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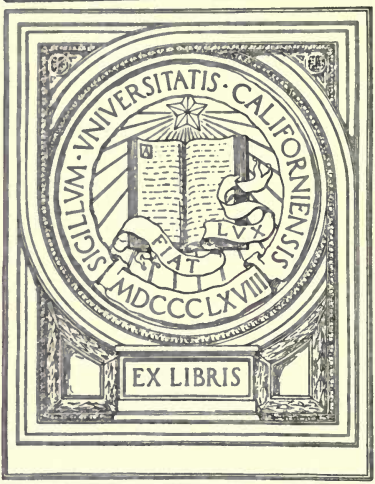

# SERMONS

ON

# SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

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Publiſhed from the original Manuſcripts,

By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

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VOL. III.

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THE SECOND EDITION.

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LONDON,

Printed for J. and F. RIVINGTON, in St. Paul's Church-Yard; and B. WHITE, at Horace's Head, in Fleet-ſtreet.

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# SERMON I.

PROV. ix. 10.

*The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom: and the Knowledge of the Holy is Understanding.*

WE all naturally desire Happiness: we all know, that obtaining it greatly depends on a wise Choice of our Conduct in Life: and yet very few examine, with any Care, what Conduct is likeliest to procure us the Felicity that we seek. The livelier Part of the World, hurried along by a giddy Tumult of Passions and Fancies, venture, with a most intrepid Gaiety of Heart, on whatever looks pleasing to them: and are in much too great Haste for present Gratification, ever to stay and once think what may be the Consequences, either to others, or even to themselves. The good-natured and flexible are easily drawn to fol-

low the more active and enterprising of their Acquaintance; and the thoughtless and indolent find it unspeakably the least Trouble to let themselves be born along by the Tide of Custom and Fashion, just as it flows and ebbs by Turns. Yet surely Reason doth not make Part of our Nature for no Purpose; nor Experience discover any Thing more plainly, than the numberless Miseries that proceed from going on thus at all Adventures.

Those, therefore, who are a little more considerate, take a different Course: yet often scarce a better, and sometimes a worse. They despise the Weakness of being caught with every Bait of present Pleasure, or abandoning their Lives to the Direction of mere Chance; and follow, with great Attention, Art and Industry, what the World calls their Interest. But this being their only View, the disappointed are totally miserable: and, more or less, all are disappointed; the far greatest Part, very grievously. And the small Remainder, who seem to attain their Wishes, betray, under the fairest Shew of outward Prosperity, evident Tokens, that they have very little inward Enjoyment to compensate for the many and long Anxieties that usually precede.

Few Things come up, even at firſt, to what they promiſed: and ſuch as do, fall below it very ſoon; leaving the Mind, at beſt, languid and unſatisfied. But if ſuch Perſons have taken, as they commonly do take, forbidden Ways, amongſt others, to their Ends; then additional Uneaſineſſes croud in upon them: painful Reflections on their paſt Behaviour; ſolicitous Apprehenſions of what may follow, both here and hereafter. For there is deeply rooted in the Heart of Man an inbred Senſe of Right and Wrong; which, however heedleſly overlooked, or ſtudiouſly ſuppreſſed by the gay or the buſy Part of the World, will, from Time to Time, make them both feel, that it hath the juſteſt Authority to govern all that we do, as well as Power to reward with the trueſt Conſolation, and puniſh with the acuteſt Remorſe.

Others, therefore, ſee the abſolute Neceſſity of bringing Virtue and Duty into the Account, when they deliberate concerning the Behaviour that leads to Happineſs. And were the Regard, which they pay to theſe, univerſal and uniform, their Happineſs would be as complete as human Nature and Circumſtances permit. But too often they, who practiſe conſcientiouſly

ſome Duties, with ſtrange Inconſiſtency utterly deſpiſe others. And, which is ſtranger yet, many, who profeſs the moſt general Concern for moral Obligations, quite forget the firſt and ſtrongeſt of them all, the Reverence due to Him, who made us. The Ties, which unite them to their Fellow-Creatures, they readily acknowledge: but unaccountably ſlight their abſolute Dependence on their Creator, and the conſequent Veneration, which they owe to that Being, *of whom, and for whom, and to whom are all Things* [a]. Now if any Diſpoſitions are good, religious ones are ſuch. They proceed from the ſame Principle, with the very beſt of others: the Exerciſe of them is the nobleſt Exertion of that Principle; and yet ſome affect to ſet up Virtue in Oppoſition to Piety; and would be thought deſirous to ſerve the former, by depreciating the latter. Some again, who are more upon their Guard, yet explain themſelves freely, on Occaſion, to allow nothing further than this; that Religion may be of Uſe to keep the Bulk of Mankind in Order: not reflecting, that the upper Part have ſtill greater Need of its Reſtraints, than

[a] 1 Cor. viii. 6. Heb. ii. 10. Rom. xi. 36.

the

the lower; and that whenever it comes to be ſpoken of, as only an Inſtrument of Policy, it will be no longer ſo much as that. But lighter Minds run wilder Lengths by far: and abſolutely indifferent what Harm may come of it, perpetually treat all ſacred Subjects, as if Freedom of Thought about them conſiſted in pouring the utmoſt Contempt upon them that was poſſible.

Yet perhaps very few, if any, of theſe, would they conſult their Hearts honeſtly, do ſo much as imagine they have any Reaſon to doubt, but a World, ſo viſibly full of beautiful Order and gracious Deſign, muſt have been firſt formed, and be ſtill governed by a moſt powerful, intelligent, and beneficent Cauſe. This, the leaſt Degree of Conſideration, how elſe the Frame of Things could be what it is, will ſufficiently ſhew: and every Advance in the Knowledge of Nature, makes the Proof, in Proportion, fuller and more obvious. If then there exiſts a Sovereign of the Univerſe, Almighty and All-wiſe, it cannot be a Matter that we are unconcerned in. He, by whoſe Pleaſure we are, and according to whoſe Determinations about us we ſhall be happy or miſerable, is not a Being unrelated to us:

nor, while he continually ſuperintends every Thing elſe on this Earth with the exacteſt Care, will he ever neglect the worthieſt Object, which it preſents to his View, the Affections and Behaviour of his rational Creature, Man. He muſt expect every Thing to act, as its Nature requires. And having diſtinguiſhed ours with the Knowledge of Himſelf; he cannot have left it in our Choice, to lay him aſide out of our Thoughts, as if we knew Him not: but muſt have intended, that we ſhould pay Him thoſe Regards, which are his due.

Now the firſt of theſe, and the Foundation of all the reſt, is a proper Temperature of Fear and Love: two Affections, which ought never to be ſeparated in thinking of God: and, therefore, whichſoever is expreſſed implies the other. The Text hath mentioned only *Fear:* but evidently means that Kind, which Children feel towards a wiſe and good Parent; which the Pſalmiſt had in his Thoughts, when he ſaid, *There is Mercy with thee: therefore ſhalt thou be feared* [b]. As God is infinitely good; and hath not only beſtowed on us all the temporal Bleſſings, that we enjoy;

[b] Pſal. cxxx. 4.

but

but offered us, on the moſt equitable Terms, through the Mediation of his bleſſed Son, and the Grace of his holy Spirit, Pardon of our Sins, Aſſiſtance of our Weakneſs, and everlaſting Life; ſurely he is amiable in the higheſt Degree: and Inſenſibility to his Goodneſs, whilſt we are moved with the faint Shadows of it in his Creatures, would be ſhocking Depravity. But then he is alſo inconceivably awful; abſolute in Authority, reſiſtleſs in Power: we and all Nature are intirely in his Hands, and depend on the Breath of his Mouth. Such a Being, we muſt own, *is greatly to be feared, and had in Reverence of* the Higheſt of *them that are round about him*[c]: Much more then ought the Sons of Men to contemplate him with Abaſement, and even *rejoice in him with Trembling*[d]. Far is this from being below the firmeſt and the braveſt Soul. Not to feel a Dread of God, muſt be the groſſeſt Stupidity: and not to own it, the moſt impotent Affectation. A worthy Heart will think Pride againſt its Maker the Extremity of Wickedneſs: and value itſelf on expreſſing zealouſly that loyal and thankful Submiſſion, which is due ſo juſtly to the King

[c] Pſ. lxxxix. 7. [d] Pſ. ii. 11.

of All; that faithful and affectionate Obedience, which his Precepts claim, who hath bought us to himself, with his Blood; that respectful and ready Compliance to which His holy Motions are intitled, who graciously *worketh in us both to will and to do*[e]. In these Things consists the true *Fear of the Lord!* For as the Text, though conceived in the most general Terms, undoubtedly comprehended at first the whole of Jewish Piety, we ought to understand it now, as comprehending the Whole of Christian. And that practising this, is the true Wisdom of Man, I shall proceed to shew you distinctly, by considering its Influence

I. On the Conduct,

II. On the Enjoyment, of our Lives.

I. On our Conduct.

Some indeed, mistaking the Dictates of Sensuality and Vanity for those of Reason, presume to speak of the Author of our Nature, as if, by giving us the several Inclinations belonging to it, he had warranted the unrestrained Indulgence of them all: and so would make his Being of no Consequence to our Actions. But a little Reflection will easily

[e] Phil. ii. 13.

confute

confute ſo wild an Imagination; and ſhew us, with how great Propriety the wiſe King hath ſaid, that *the Knowledge of the Holy is Underſtanding.* He, who is perfectly holy and righteous himſelf, muſt have regard to what is right and fit in others. He, who hath provided with ſuch fatherly Care for the common Good of us all, can never have left us at Liberty to defeat his Purpoſe, by injuring and corrupting one another, and filling his World with Confuſion and Miſery at our Pleaſure. He hath not planted in us Paſſions, Affections, and Appetites, to grow up wild as Accident directs; but to be diligently ſuperintended, weeded and pruned, and each confined to its proper Bounds. He hath not endued us with a Principle of Conſcience, to be overborn by Reſentments and Intereſts, drowned in ſenſual Gratifications, led captive by Faſhions and Fancies: but to be cultivated and improved; and then obeyed, as the Guide of Life. Its Authority is derived from himſelf: and its Judgment upon us will be finally affirmed by his own. For it cannot be, that the Sovereign of all the Earth ſhould either fail to reward ſuch as dutifully promote his gracious Deſigns, or let any one be a Gainer by acting in Contradiction

tradiction to them. Theſe things every Perſon's own Heart, if permitted, will tell him very plainly. But our Underſtandings are unhappily prejudiced in Favour of our bad Inclinations: and were they leſs ſo, the unaſſiſted Reaſon of fallen Man is able to trace out but a very imperfect Syſtem of Religion. And therefore to complete the Aſſurance of its great Truths, expreſs Revelation from above hath given us undeniable Evidence, that univerſal Virtue is God's Law, and eternal Happineſs or Miſery its Sanctions: adding at the ſame time whatever more particular Notices, Directions, and Encouragements our Condition wanted. Now what can poſſibly influence Men, like ſuch a Motive ſo enforced? And how weakly muſt they judge, or how ill muſt they mean, who would abandon ſo ſolid a Foundation of right Behaviour, to lay the Streſs of ſo important a Building on any other!

It would both be unjuſt and unwiſe to reject the ſmalleſt Inducement to any Part of Goodneſs: for we greatly need every one that we can have. But it is extremely requiſite to obſerve, where our chief Security lies, and place our chief Truſt there. The Reaſonableneſs, the Dignity, the Beauty of Virtue,

are

are doubtleſs natural, and ought to be ſtrong Recommendations of it. But how faint Impreſſions do they make on the Ignorant and Slow of Apprehenſion, on Minds agitated with Paſſions, or hardened in Sins! And indeed how ſoon do ſuch Impreſſions, if ſingle and unſupported, fade away out of all Minds, or dwindle into mere Speculation, amidſt the Temptations of a bad World, the Allurements of Senſe, and the Treacheries of *a deceitful Heart*[f]! Again: the temporal Advantages of Virtue and bad Effects of Wickedneſs, ordinarily ſpeaking, are weighty Arguments. But ſtill, how often doth that Weight fall on the wrong Side; or give little Help, if any, to the right! In ſhort, many Incitements to think and act as we ought, are in general uſeful: but none is at all Times ſufficient, excepting only the Fear of God *taught as the Truth is in Jeſus*[g].

This is one unchangeable Motive, level to the Apprehenſion of every Perſon, extending to the Practice of every Duty, including at once every moral Diſpoſition of Heart, and every prudent Regard to our own Good. There needs but a Thought to bring it with

[f] Jer. xvii. 9. [g] Eph. iv. 21.

ſuch

ſuch Force to our Minds, as will check the ſtrongeſt Paſſions, curb the moſt extravagant Levity of Spirit, overbalance the greateſt temporal Advantages; and make whatever is our Duty appear, in the ſtrongeſt Light, to be our Intereſt. The Fear of God can pierce the inmoſt Receſſes of our Minds, and ſearch the Rightneſs of our moſt ſecret Deſires. Reflecting well what his Eye ſees there, will make us ſee it in a Point of View, that we never ſhould elſe; and put us on approving our Souls to him by Simplicity and Truth: no longer attempting, as unhappily we are too prone, to cheat others and ourſelves with falſe Appearances; but faithfully bewailing all our paſt Faults, and watchfully guarding againſt all future ones. Particularly, the Conſciouſneſs of having ſuch a Witneſs to each Action and Purpoſe, muſt powerfully incline us to be very compoſed and moderate in every Proceeding, very mild and reaſonable towards every Perſon. Reverence of God's Authority will make us fear to injure the meaneſt of our Fellow-Creatures; ſince even he is under the Protection of the Almighty. And hope of ſharing in his Bounty will teach us to imitate it by the tendereſt Exerciſe of Humanity and

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Compaſſion. Thus influenced, thoſe of higher Rank would be public Bleſſings and Examples: their Inferiors would love and honour his Image impreſſed upon them: and all would endeavour to fill worthily whatever Station the Wiſdom of Providence allotted them: diſcharging conſcientiouſly the Duties of the moſt laborious, and counting it an Honour to ſerve God in the leaſt conſiderable.

But let us now inquire,

II. What Effect the Fear of God muſt have on the Enjoyment of our Lives.

Unqueſtionably it will make bad People uneaſy. But then it is both for the World's Good, and their own, that they ſhould be ſo. It is not their thinking of their Condition, that renders it a dreadful one. The leſs they feel it, the worſe it is: and feeling it to Purpoſe will be the happieſt Thing poſſible for them. Farther: this Fear doubtleſs reſtrains Perſons from diſſolute Pleaſures, and diſhonourable Means of obtaining Profit, Power, Advancement. But ſo doth Virtue: ſo for the moſt Part doth common Prudence. And Religion never forbids us even a hurtful Gratification, but it offers us Happineſs hereafter in Return for our preſent Self-denial. Farther ſtill: we

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muſt own, it gives a peculiar Seriouſneſs and Awe to the Mind of Man. But we have need to be kept in Order by a Senſe of God's parental Authority: and without it ſhould quickly become ungovernable, miſchievous, and wretched. He requires us not in the leaſt to be gloomy and comfortleſs; or full of Terrors, while we mean to do well: but freely permits us the chearfulleſt Uſe of all our Faculties, that is conſiſtent with Innocence, and with making Improvement in Goodneſs our chief Care, as it will be our chief Felicity.

And if the Thought of Him doth moderate the Livelineſs of over-gay Diſpoſitions; it prevents, by ſo doing, many great Evils, into which they would otherwiſe hurry us; and fills us with much more inward and deeply-felt Satisfactions, than thoſe light and trifling ones, that only play upon the Surface of an inconſiderate Mind. Or did that Compoſure, which Piety introduces, leſſen our Enjoyments for a Time; yet, being what our State on Earth, which is in many Reſpects a ſerious one, demands; if we are wiſe, we ſhall gladly conform ourſelves to the Condition which God hath placed us in; and truſt Him, that the Conſequences will be happy.

Such

Such indeed will every one, who makes the Trial, ſoon find them. What Pleaſure can be greater, than a full Perſuaſion, that our Behaviour is approved by Him, who knows our Hearts, and will reward with his Friendſhip whatever we do aright? The World is generally a negligent Spectator, and too often an unfair Interpreter, of the beſt Actions. This cannot but give Uneaſineſs and Diſcouragement to Virtue, unleſs it be animated by nobler Views. But the Recollection, that God looks on with Eſteem, ſets us above the Cenſures of Men, and even above their Applauſes. For were all Mankind to join in doing Juſtice to exalted Merit; how poor would the Recompence be, and how low the Delight, compared with His, who can lay open his Principles and his Behaviour, with humble Confidence, before the Judge of all!

Then as to the Sufferings of this Life; which, very frequently make up a great Share of it; Religion entirely prevents many of them, by withholding us from the Sins and the Follies that commonly bring them upon us. And it wonderfully diminiſhes the reſt, by looſening our Attachments to what we

muſt

must expect to be disappointed in, or separated from; and leading us, from the *broken Cisterns* of worldly Comfort, to God *the Fountain of living Waters*[h]; in the Assurance of whose Grace, our great Interest is safe, under every Change; and by the Superintendency of whose Providence *all Things work together for our Good*[i]. What are the poor Consolations of Philosophy, or the Amusements, which thoughtless Minds take Refuge in, to deceive their Sorrows, compared with such cheering Reflexions as these! Still, what is naturally painful, must be felt so: but the insupportable Part of every Affliction is taken away, when we consider it, as ordered by Him, whose Right to dispose of us we must acknowledge, and of whose kind Intention to us we may always be sure.

A Heart, habitually formed to such Meditations as these, with what Serenity must it pass through its allotted Pilgrimage here below! It hath nothing to fear: it hath nothing to hide, from others or itself. It can bear Solitude, and its own Inspection. It can even rejoice in the Sense of his Presence, who is to others inexpressibly terrible;

[h] Jer. ii. 13. [i] Rom. viii. 28.

but

but to the pious Soul an immoveable Ground of Security, an inexhauſtible Source of Happineſs. For, indeed, what greater Happineſs can we wiſh to ourſelves, than to be placed under the fatherly Guidance of infinite Foreſight and Power; born up under all the Calamities of Life; and, which is the great Point, exalted with the nobleſt Hopes of what ſhall follow after Death!

Our Time on Earth is ſo ſhort; and our Pleaſures at beſt ſo languid and rare, and mixed with ſo many Anxieties, Pains and Sorrows; that ſurely it is a melancholy View, to think of ending here; and after a very few Days are gone over our Heads, becoming for ever, as if we had never been. Yet this is much more than irreligious Perſons can poſſibly promiſe themſelves. Could there be no God, they would have no Certainty, but that their Beings might continue, and might be miſerable. For what is there that may not be, on the Suppoſition of an ungoverned World? But ſince there is a God; ſlighting and diſobeying him muſt be Crimes, and muſt be puniſhed. We may have little Attention to this perhaps, in the Tumult of youthful Fancies and worldly Purſuits. But

when the Close of the Scene approaches, and Age or Sickness rouses up Reflection from its Sleep, then will the Sinner, in all Likelihood, see, with Terror unspeakable, those awful Realities, of which if he is never convinced in this World, he will only be the more wretched in the next. But the darkest Hour to such, may, with Reason, be the joyfullest to him, who having faithfully acknowledged God in all his Ways, perceives that now his Work is over, and his Reward at hand. Undoubtedly it is best to use no stronger Expressions on this Subject, than the less experienced may feel to be just: else, Words want Force to describe the Difference between these two Conditions. It is true, not all pious Souls are conscious of it, just at the Time of their Departure. Frequently their setting Sun is obscured by Insensibility: sometimes overcast by Doubts and Fears. But they shall instantly behold it rising again, to shine with unclouded and increasing Lustre to all Eternity. For *Light is sown for the Righteous, and Gladness for the Upright in Heart. Rejoice in the Lord, ye Righteous, and give Thanks at the Remembrance of his Holiness* [k].

[k] Ps. xcvii. 11, 12.

Such

Such then is the good Influence of the Fear of God: and his genuine Fear can have no bad one. Reverence of a wiſe and holy Being will never miſlead Men into any Thing wicked or weak. Falſe Religion, indeed, may do both: and ſo may falſe Notions of Virtue or Friendſhip, or any other valuable Quality. But this was never thought an Argument in any Caſe beſides, againſt being governed by the true; and yet leſs ought it in the preſent. God *muſt be worſhipped* by us *in Spirit and in Truth*[1], let others worſhip him as wrongly as they will: and his Laws muſt be obeyed, let ever ſo many miſtake Errors of their own for ſuch. The Danger of Superſtition is a very powerful Reaſon, why religious Belief and Practice ſhould be watched over, and directed right: but cannot poſſibly be a Reaſon, why diſſolute Profaneneſs ſhould be encouraged or ſuffered. Let rational Piety be throughly eſtabliſhed, and Superſtition falls of Courſe. But if the Former be rooted out, the Latter will certainly grow up in its Place. There is a natural Bent in human Minds to believe and reſpect an inviſible Power: and if it be turned aſide from point-

[1] John iv. 24.

ing, in a proper Manner, towards its proper Object, it will ſoon acquire ſome other Form; probably an abſurd and pernicious one. Infidelity promiſes great Freedom and Enjoyment of Life: but in Fact it proves, in Proportion as it prevails, a State of Madneſs and Confuſion, of perpetual Danger from others, of Diſcomfort and deſperate Reſolutions within Mens own Breaſts: and therefore, after ſome Trial of it, they will eagerly run away from it into the oppoſite Extreme.

True Religion then being of ſuch Importance, there are ſome Things, which may juſtly be expected of Mankind in its Favour.

1. That they, who have not yet carefully ſearched into the Grounds of it, ſhould not take upon them to treat it with Scorn, or even Diſregard. What ſo deeply concerns all Men, and what the wiſeſt and moſt conſiderate of Men have lived and died in the firm Belief of, ought not ſurely to be thrown aſide, on hearing only a few ſuperficial Objections, and ludicrous Turns of Words to its Diſadvantage. There muſt need more than this to confute it; and therefore whoever, with little Reading and little Thought, finds much Inclination to diſbelieve, ſhould learn to ſuſpect himſelf,

himſelf, inſtead of his Creed, and be modeſt in Proportion to his Unacquaintedneſs with the Subject.

2. It may be expected alſo, that they, who profeſs to examine, ſhould do it fairly. Moſt Men will be backward to confeſs, that they wiſh againſt Religion; becauſe it is confeſſing, that they have Reaſon to fear, if the Univerſe be well governed. But each ought to think well, whether this be not ſecretly his Caſe, and remove the Prepoſſeſſion of his bad Life, before he pretends to be an upright Judge. After that, if he finds Difficulties, let him remember, that they are to be found in every Thing, and yet ſomething muſt be true. If he meets not with the Sort, or the Degree of Evidence, which he looked for; let him recollect, that a fair Mind will be ſatisfied with any that turns the Scale. If he doubts of ſome Points; let him ſtill hold faſt thoſe, which remain undoubted; and preſerve that Reſpect to Religion in general, which will prove his beſt Guide in every Particular. Nay, were it poſſible for him to doubt of the Whole; yet, ſince Doubt is not Certainty, his Practice however ſhould be on the ſafer Side. And if he ſees, as one ſhould think he

muſt, that Scepticiſm and Infidelity will deſtroy the chief Comfort of the Good, endanger the Virtue of all, and weaken the Bonds of Civil Society; never let the poor Vanity of propagating his Notions tempt him to be the Author, or Promoter, of ſo dreadful a Miſchief to human Kind. But

3. The laſt, and moſt important Thing of all to be expected is, that they who are ſo happy as to believe, ſhould ſecure and complete their Happineſs by what alone can do it, a ſuitable Behaviour. Too often the contrary Courſe is taken: and many who had once ſome Regard for Religion, but unhappily accompanied with vicious Indulgencies, force themſelves to throw it off, that they may ſin undiſturbed. But let no one imagine, that denying God will make the leaſt Amends for diſobeying him; or that ſtifling our Convictions can ever give any true Peace; which is only to be had by enforcing them home on our Hearts, and conforming our Lives to them. This we have all need to do with the utmoſt Care, amidſt ſo many, ſo powerful, ſo ſudden Temptations to the contrary, as the World and the Devil, and our own corrupt Nature, throw in our Way. And as the Reverence of

our heavenly Father is the moſt effectual Preſervative, we ought to keep up that in its full Strength, by frequently repeating fervent Prayer to him, and affecting Meditations upon him. How intirely the Exerciſes of Devotion are laid aſide by ſome; and with what Indifference, and even Contempt, a mere outward Shew of them, now and then, is juſt retained by others, who yet call themſelves Chriſtians; too many of you, I fear, know too well: and it furniſhes Matter of melancholy Reflection, not only to every pious, but every prudent Mind. For good Men muſt feel, that the Regard, due to God, is a moſt inward, conſtant and awful one: and wiſe Men muſt ſurely perceive, that neither can the common Welfare be preſerved without Morals; nor Morals, without Religion; nor Religion, without Worſhip; private Worſhip, to ſtrengthen our own Senſe of Duty; and public Worſhip, to ſpread it amongſt others.

On all Accounts, therefore, it is our moſt important Concern to cultivate and expreſs the Affections of Piety; which are indeed the nobleſt Movements of our Souls towards the worthieſt Object, towards the Attainment of the moſt bleſſed End: and

to awaken ourſelves from the Remiſſneſs, into which we apt to fall, on this Head beyond others, by reminding our Hearts often, that God is preſent, and a future State ſoon will be ſo; and how ſoon to any of us, none can tell. May we all reſolve, from this Moment, to ſtrive earneſtly for a happy Share in it, through Faith in the Merits of our dear Redeemer, and a right Uſe of the Suggeſtions of the Divine Spirit: to both whom, with the Father Almighty, be Honour and Praiſe, now and for ever! Amen.

SERMON

# SERMON II.

MARK viii. 34.

*And when he had called the People unto him, with his Diſciples alſo: he ſaid unto them, Whoſoever will come after me, let him deny himſelf, and take up his Croſs, and follow me.*

EVery Word, which proceeded out of the Mouth of our bleſſed Lord, muſt unqueſtionably deſerve a very ſerious Attention. But ſome Things being peculiarly needful to be known, or liable to be forgotten; to theſe, on proper Occaſions, he demanded the eſpecial Regard of his Hearers: and as they were bound to pay it, ſo are we. Thus in the foregoing Chapter, finding it requiſite to confute the Jewiſh Traditions in Favour of that ceremonial Purity in their Perſons and Food, which led them to overlook the moral Purity of the Heart, we are told, that *when he had called all the People unto him, he ſaid, Hearken unto me every*

*every one of you, and understand. There is nothing from without a Man, that entring into him can defile him: but the Things which come out of him,* wicked Thoughts and their Consequences, *those are they that defile the Man: if any Man hath Ears to hear, let him hear*[a]. With the same Kind of Solemnity he delivered the Words of the Text: which indeed had still greater Need of it, as the Former contradicted only received Opinions and Customs; but these, the strongest of our natural Passions and Appetites. *When he had called,* &c.

*Taking up the Cross* relates, in the primary and strict Sense, only to suffering patiently for the [b] Truth: a Duty, God be thanked, less common amongst us at present, and which therefore I shall pass over. In its larger Acceptation it will be found to coincide with *Self-denial:* a Word of great Importance to be rightly apprehended, because it expresses here the Condition, on which alone we shall be acknowledged the true Followers of Christ. The Terms of Salvation are indeed elsewhere laid before us in Phrases more intelligible at first Sight: but illustrating this darker one will not only contribute to prove that the different

[a] Mark vii. 14, 15, 16. [b] Vid. Suicer in Σταυρος, p. 1085.

Views

Views of the Chriſtian Doctrine are all conſiſtent with each other, but diſcover to us the principal Cauſe of our acting wrong, with the moſt effectual Method of Amendment, perhaps more fully, than any Thing elſe can. I ſhall therefore endeavour,

I. To explain the literal Meaning of the Expreſſion:

II. To ſhew with what Limitations it muſt be underſtood:

III. To ſet before you the Obligation of the Duty, comprehended under it; and its Importance to our Virtue and our Happineſs.

I. To explain the literal Meaning of the Expreſſion.

We ſpeak every Day of denying ourſelves ſuch or ſuch a Pleaſure, that is refuſing to ourſelves the Enjoyment of it. But the Scripture Senſe goes much beyond this, and extends to renouncing and diſowning ourſelves; throwing out of our Thoughts the Relation that we bear to our own Perſons; and behaving with as little Indulgence, as if a mere Stranger to us, were in Queſtion. Of Courſe

we

we have in general the moſt Concern for thoſe of whom we have the moſt Knowledge. And hence, in the ſacred Books, knowing or owning any one ſignifies having a Regard for him: and denying any one, the contrary. Thus wicked Perſons are ſaid to *deny God, while they profeſs to know him* [c], and our Saviour in return will deny them at the great Day, ſaying, *Depart from me, I know you not* [d]. Thus alſo, in the Old Teſtament, when the Children of *Levi* had ſuppreſſed a Rebellion of the People againſt God and their lawful Governors, by falling without Diſtinction upon all whom they found engaged in it, *Moſes* deſcribes the heroick Behaviour of that Tribe in theſe Terms: *who ſaid unto his Father and to his Mother, I have not ſeen him, neither did he acknowledge his Brethren, nor knew his own Children; for he obſerved thy Word and kept thy Covenant* [e]: That is, they preferred their Duty to Heaven and the Publick, before the tendereſt private Regards. *Job* comes yet nearer to the Phraſe before us: *Though I were perfect*, which he had juſt been diſclaiming, *yet would I not know my Soul* [f]; were

[c] Tit. i. 16. [d] Matth. vii. 23. xxv. 12. Luke xiii. 25, 27. [e] Deut. xxxiii. 9. [f] Job ix. 21.

I freer

I freer from Faults than I am, it ſhould not tempt me to Self-partiality.

But indeed the Context may ſuffice to ſhew the Meaning of the Text. Our Saviour had been foretelling his future Sufferings. *Peter's* warm Zeal for his Maſter overpowered his Reſpect, and he *began to rebuke him, ſaying, Be it far from thee, Lord, this ſhall not be unto thee*[g]. But the Holy *Jeſus* immediately rebukes him in Return before the Diſciples; tells him he was, in the Tendency, though not the Deſign of his Words, a Tempter, an Adverſary to him; and influenced by human Weakneſs, inſtead of religious Fortitude. *Get thee behind me Satan: for thou ſavoureſt not the Things that be of God, but thoſe that be of Men*[h]. Then calling *the People to him* alſo, but in Kindneſs to the well-meaning Apoſtle concealing from them the particular Occaſion, he aſſures them, with that noble Diſintereſtedneſs, which he ſhewed perpetually, that if they would become his Diſciples indeed, they muſt *deny themſelves* and follow him: diſregard as he did and ſhould do, every Inſtinct and Averſion, every Paſſion and Affection that belong to the human

[g] Matt. xvi. 21, 22. [h] Ver. 23.

Frame.

Frame[i]. And harſh as this Declaration may ſeem, he hath uſed a harſher yet. *If any Man come to me, and hate not his Father and Mother, and Wife and Children, and Brethren and Siſters, yea and his own Life alſo, he cannot be my Diſciple*[k]. Agreeably to which, St. *Paul* ſets it down at the Head of a long Catalogue of moſt dreadful Sins, that *Men ſhall be Lovers of their own Selves*[l]. But now it will be thought full Time, that a Doctrine ſo alarming ſhould

II. Be put under due Limitations.

For, after all, Self-love being a Part of that Nature, which God hath given us, can we, or ought we to diveſt ourſelves of it? Is there any Poſſibility of Happineſs without it? Doth not Religion apply to it as our main Principle of Action, recommend its Precepts chiefly from their Tendency to our Good; and even make our own *Love to our Selves* the Meaſure and Rule of that, which we ought to have for *our Neighbour*[m]? Why, doubtleſs theſe Things are true: and ſo evidently true, that we may be ſure our bleſſed Saviour, whoſe Life was in no Reſpect unneceſſarily auſtere, and whoſe Doc-

[i] See Authorities of the Fathers for this Interpretation in Suicer, voc. Απαρνεομαι & Αρνησις. [k] Luke xiv. 26. [l] 2 Tim. iii. 2. [m] Matt. xxii 39.

trine

trine is every where elſe ſo rational and mild, could never intend to require in the Text, and the few others that reſemble it, either that we ſhould deny and diſregard ourſelves intirely, which is impracticable; or uſeleſly, which would be unfit. And therefore, as he could not, without the utmoſt unreaſonableneſs, be ſuſpected of forbidding a prudent and virtuous Self-love, he might ſafely and advantageouſly employ the ſtrongeſt Terms in prohibiting a weak and vicious one: for in ſuch Caſes Abatements at leaſt ſufficient hardly ever fail of being made. However, to prevent Miſtakes and Miſrepreſentations, he hath taught us more particularly, how to interpret all his Injunctions of this Kind, by interpreting himſelf the hardeſt of them, (that of *hating* every Thing which we naturally hold dear) to bear only the comparative Senſe of *loving* nothing *more than him* [n], but preferring Obedience to the Laws of God before any other Conſideration. For in the ſtrict and literal Meaning, his Apoſtle hath told us, *no Man ever yet hated his own Fleſh* [o].

Had he enjoined us a Number of difficult Obſervances, of which we ſaw not the Uſe, we

[n] Matt. x. 37. [o] Eph. v. 29.

ought

ought certainly to have believed they had one, and obeyed him implicitly. But ſince, on the contrary, he hath eſtabliſhed a ſpiritual Religion, neither impoſing unaccountable Reſtraints, nor encumbered with many or troubleſome Ceremonies; we ought, both to receive it with moſt joyful Reverence, and to preſerve it in that amiable Simplicity, in which he delivered it: not laying on ourſelves any Burthen, but ſuch as may enable us to bear the better what he hath laid on us; and much leſs uſurping Dominion over the Practice of others.

Extremely ill therefore hath the Church of *Rome* underſtood the Nature of Chriſtianity, in appointing as proper Inſtances of Self-denial, ſo many frivolous and vexatious Auſterities of Abſtinences and Penances, that ſerve to no good Purpoſe; and encouraging Multitudes to make Vows of living ſeparate from the World in Poverty and Celibacy, only to ſpend a tedious Life in the meritorious Employments of wearing different Habits, eating different Food, keeping different Hours, and obſerving different Rules in common Things from the reſt of their Fellow-creatures and from one another: as if it could be the Intention of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs to ſet Men on

finding

finding out new Ways of being uneaſy and abſurd. They plead indeed, that ſuch Methods habituate them to a Spirit of Obedience, and a Readineſs of parting with their own Inclinations. But Obedience to God cannot be ſhewn by doing what he never commanded: and blind Obedience to mere Men he hath cautioned us againſt, inſtead of requiring it. We are to *deny ourſelves and follow Chriſt:* not to *deny ourſelves and follow* Guides, equally fallible with ourſelves, into whatever Extravagancies they direct, that will only produce Ignorance and Bigotry in one Part of the World, and Contempt and Abhorrence of Religion in the other. But theſe additional Duties, which the Church enjoins, they ſay, conduce to the more eaſy Practice of thoſe which God hath enjoined. Why, ſome of them, in ſome Caſes, may: and then they ſhould, with Prudence and Moderation, be uſed and recommended. But preſcribing by mere human Authority a great Number of ſuch Things, at all Adventures, for almoſt all alike, or for any during their whole Lives, is an evident Mark, either of wrong Judgement, or bad Deſign. To the Inconſiderate indeed they make a ſpecious Appearance. But if we re-

flect, how exorbitant a Degree of ill-uſed Power and Wealth hath been artfully obtained by requiring them firſt, and occaſionally diſpenſing with them afterwards; how little Good is done by them, that might not as well have been done without them; and how very much Evil naturally muſt, and in Fact doth, ariſe from them; needleſs Difficulties and Diſquiet to the Good, falſe Hopes to Sinners of compenſating for the Wickedneſs which they continue to indulge, ſpiritual Pride in thoſe who obſerve them rigidly, and uncharitable Cenſures, nay often Perſecutions alſo, of ſuch as do not; we ſhall be fully convinced, that ſuperadding thus imaginary Duties to real ones is far from promoting the true Intereſts of Chriſtian Piety. And indeed all Hardſhips under which Men put themſelves of their own Accord, not being enjoined in Scripture, nor evidently needful to preſerve them from Sin, and to raiſe their Thoughts to a better World, (eſpecially if they tend to promote Rigour and Sourneſs rather than Mildneſs and Humility) hurt inſtead of benefiting them, and diſcredit Religion with others: which in itſelf is a *reaſonable Service* [p], and directs us *not to refuſe*

[p] Rom. xii. 1.

*the*

*the good Creatures of God*, but to *receive them with Thankſgiving*[q].

But ſome will aſk, is not this explaining away to nothing what Chriſt hath moſt ſolemnly commanded as a very important Duty? How doth ſuch Doctrine leave any Room for Self-denial? And wherein after all will it conſiſt? I anſwer, in what Human Nature uſually finds much more Reluctance to practiſe, than any of the Severities mentioned yet. For there are none, that wicked Men will not gladly undergo, rather than quit their favourite Faults. Beſides, the ſtrict Impoſers of unneceſſary Reſtraints on their Fellow-chriſtians or themſelves in ſome Points, generally make Amends in others by proportionable Indulgences of unlawful Gratifications. And ſo, between both, it ſeldom fails, but Sin and Superſtition make a Shift to go on, Hand in Hand, very comfortably. But the true Self-denial allows of no ſuch Compromiſes. It is an abſolute and univerſal Surrender of every Part of us to the Diſpoſal of our Maker: not only of the Cravings of Fleſh and Senſe, but of Self-opinion, Self-will, Self-intereſt: of Love and Hatred, Hope and Fear: nay, not

[q] 1 Tim. iv. 4.

of our Appetites and Affections only, but of *every Imagination*[r] of our Underſtandings alſo, ſhort of that full Conviction of Truth, which the God of Truth himſelf hath appointed for our Guide. In a Word, it is giving our whole ſelves away from ourſelves, as it were, into his Hands; and determining, once for all, that not our own Thoughts, Inclinations, and Deſires, ſhall govern us, but the Laws of God: not *our Will, but His*, however contrary to it, ſhall *be done*[s]. Theſe inward Principles are, in a moral Senſe, the Man: and it is, in full Propriety of Speech, denying and renouncing ourſelves, when what we ſhould conceive or wiſh or chuſe is laid intirely out of the Queſtion, and the only Thing regarded is, what Heaven points out to us, to believe and do, whether by Reaſon or by Revelation. Mortification and Self-denial have both of them been often almoſt wholly miſapprehended: and even, when ſomewhat better underſtood, have been much confounded one with the other. But though nearly akin, they are very diſtinguiſhable. The former is killing, deſtroying Sin within ourſelves: the latter, diſowning and caſting off whatever is

[r] 2 Cor. x. 5. [s] Luke xxii. 42.

deareſt

dearest to us, in such Degree as is necessary to destroy Sin. And this being the Nature of the Duty, we need never fear, but Occasions of practising it will be frequent and trying enough. The much greater Need will be to fill our Souls with a strong Conviction of what I shall now endeavour to shew,

III. The indispensable Obligation of it, and its unspeakable Importance to our Virtue and our Happiness.

That Being, *of whom and to whom are all Things* [t], whose Nature is absolutely simple and infinitely perfect, *cannot*, as the Apostle expresses it [u], *deny himself*. There is nothing within him, but Rectitude and Holiness; nothing without him, but what wholly depends on him: and therefore his sole Rule of Action must be his own good Pleasure. But the most exalted of Creatures, being his Servants and his Property, are essentially so far bound to Self-denial, as not to do their own Will, but the Will of him who sent them into Life. And in Proportion as the Frame of any moral Agent is compounded of superior and inferior Principles, the more he will be obliged to disregard and deny the lower, in order to

[t] Rom. xi. 36. [u] 2 Tim. ii. 13.



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follow the Dictates of the higher. But wretched Man, fallen and sinful, lies under a heavier Necessity of this Kind: for, made up of wrong Propensities, in the Degree that he is, in order to *deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts* [w], he must *deny himself* continually. Christ indeed hath procured us by his Blood the Means of Recovery from this lamentable Condition: but still he only frees us from Slavery, to subject us to a just and gracious Government: *we are not our own, for we are bought with a Price* [x]: and since by Him we live, who *were dead in Trespasses and Sins* [y], we are to *live henceforth, not unto ourselves, but unto Him, which died for us, and rose again* [z]. So that both as Creatures, and as fallen and redeemed Creatures, Self-denial and Self-surrender is our indispensable general Duty. And we shall find it previously necessary to the right Performance of every particular Duty that lies before us.

Our Appetites, Passions, and Fancies, are by Nature many: and partly by the Corruption of our Nature, partly by voluntary Indulgence, they are headstrong and mischievous.

[w] Tit. ii. 12. [x] 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. [y] Eph. ii. 1, [z] 2 Cor. v. 15.

What

What muſt be the Conſequence then, if we either ſtudy to humour them ſtill farther, or let them take their own free Courſe? Plainly, that they will become quite ungovernable, and multiply Sin and Guilt upon us without End. The very Thought of Virtue and Piety will be ſo excluded, as ſeldom to occur to us: and whenever Conſcience doth adventure to ſound the unwelcome Words in our Ears, it will be ſilenced, overpowered, and baniſhed from the Place where it ought to dwell and preſide. Sometimes it may carry a ſingle Point or two: but ſtill, what upon the whole is uppermoſt in our Hearts, will upon the whole govern our Lives; and the occaſional Victories, obtained now and then, will be attended with continually greater Difficulty and Pain, and therefore will be attempted leſs and leſs frequently. Look around you: look within you: what is our general Condition here on Earth? Immoderate Deſire of Wealth or Power, or Fame, or Pleaſure, or Eaſe, Reſentment, Envy, Vanity, ſome wrong Inclination or other, is is well if not more than one, ſprings up early: an ill-judging Self-love cheriſhes it without Examination: we take it haſtily for granted, that here lies our

Happineſs, and accordingly purſue it: many, without ever putting the Queſtion, whether Virtue or Religion forbid them or not. Others indeed do chance to reflect a little at Times; ſome of them enough to form a Sort of Reſolution, that they will quit ſuch and ſuch of their Vices, perhaps all of them. But then, as they will, notwithſtanding, preſerve in general the ſame falſe Tenderneſs for themſelves that they ever had, and leave to mere Inclination or Caprice the ſame Dominion over them; it is eaſy to foreſee, that theſe Reſolutions muſt have a very ineffectual, a very ſhort-lived Influence, and every Thing quickly relapſe into its former State. So long then as we ſuffer it to be at all a determining Reaſon for acting thus or thus, in Caſes of Importance, that we have a Mind to act ſo, there cannot be any Hope of our behaving right with the leaſt Uniformity or Conſtancy: and the only Way is, to ſtrike at the Root of all our Faults, wrong Self-indulgence, inſtead of cutting off little Branches and Twigs, that will ſprout afterwards faſter than before.

Nor is this of more Conſequence to our Virtue than to what is cloſely connected with it here, and inſeparably hereafter, our Happineſs. Every Principle in

our Nature was originally placed there for our Good, but, when corrupted and improperly exerted, produces Harm to us. And in particular, the dear Affection that we bear to ourſelves, if it ſeeks to attain its End by miſtaken Means, muſt fail of it, and make us miſerable. The tender Fondneſs that will ſuffer us to miſs no Pleaſure, and bear no Hardſhip, will as certainly deſtroy all Firmneſs and Health in the Soul, as it doth in the Body, and unfit us in both Reſpects equally for what we muſt have to go through in Life. Under this unhappy Management, groundleſs Averſions and pernicious Deſires grow continually more vehement; wild Fancies multiply; each of them claims the abſolute Sway, and we are torn in Pieces by their Contentions. Or if they rule more amicably by Turns, the various Purſuits to which they ſucceſſively prompt us, we often ſee at the Time, are leading us to Ruin: yet we know not how to be ſo cruel to ourſelves, as to prefer the united Intereſts of this World and the next to a preſent favourite Inclination. So we graſp momentary Pleaſures, quickly followed by laſting Uneaſineſs: are tormented by daily Diſappointments in what we obtain, as well

as

as what we aimed at without Succeſs: and very commonly, after innumerable Follies and Sufferings, the whole ends in Deſpondency and Sourneſs, Diſlike of ourſelves and every one around us, Diſſatisfaction with the univerſal State of Things, and the very Author of it: whilſt, like ungoverned Children, we know not what we would have, and nothing can pleaſe us. For the ſame Gratification of every Humour, that makes Children both wicked and wretched, hath juſt the ſame Effect on all thoſe, who, by treating themſelves in the like Manner, contrive to be no wiſer throughout the Courſe of their Lives than they were at the Beginning. But, whether we go on to be toſſed through a reſtleſs Variety of wrong Purſuits, or fix on ſome one, that ſhall carry us forward more uniformly in Error, it is in Effect the ſame Thing. By the one Means or the other we are ſure to be miſerable, even in this World, and unſpeakably more ſo in the next, if we permit our own Wills and Paſſions to be our Guides.

Therefore our bleſſed Lord, *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*[a], who perfectly knew, both what our Nature and Condition require

[a] John xiv. 6.

of

of us, and what our Maker deſigns us for, hath pointed out the only wiſe Method; that we *deny ourſelves, and follow Him:* that, renouncing the Indulgence of our own Inclinations, we take his Example and his Laws for our only Rule; and, without ſtanding to compute what we may loſe or ſuffer by it in this or that Caſe, venture to give up Body and Soul in all Caſes to his Government; and ſeeking Happineſs by no other Means than Obedience, truſt God for the Conſequences. Were we but in ſuch a State of Mind, we ſhould have one invariable Rule to act by, "This is my Duty, therefore nothing ſhall ſeduce me from it: this is contrary to my Duty, therefore nothing ſhall engage me in it." We ſhould have one general and full Anſwer conſtantly ready for all Temptations, inſtead of the manifold Diſadvantages and Hazards of debating Particulars with each of them ſingly. Their Force muſt be unſpeakably leſſened, would we but follow this Direction in earneſt; never admit an enſnaring ſecond Thought to creep in and puzzle a plain Caſe, nor afford Time to a vicious Deſire to argue the Point with us, and paint itſelf out in plauſible and inviting Colours to deceive us; but, the

Moment we ſee it to be vicious, look on it in that ſole View, reject it without Delay for that ſole Reaſon, and think no more of it. Elſe we ſhall be all Inconſtancy and Irreſolulution, diſtracted between the *Services of two Maſters*; ſometimes preferring one, ſometimes the other; then contriving a thouſand ſilly Schemes to reconcile both, and entangled by every Endeavour in freſh Perplexities. Whereas, would we throughly give up our whole Selves into the Hands of our rightful Sovereign, and fix the Regard we owe Him for the one Principle of our Conduct; the Preſence of that Thought would awe into Silence whatever was oppoſite to it; our bad Inclinations would die away and be forgotten; good ones would ſpring up, and have nothing to oppoſe their Growth; a better Self, *a new Man created after the Image* of God would be formed within us, inſtead of that which we had put *off*[b]; and our Advances in Goodneſs would be aſtoniſhing: like thoſe of the pious Corinthians, whoſe charitable Contributions, the Apoſtle declares, were beyond his Hopes: *but*, ſaith he, *they firſt gave their own Selves to the Lord, and* then *to us by the Will of God*[c].

[b] Col. iii. 10. [c] 2 Cor. viii. 5.

This

This indeed is the only Way to be religious: and Religion is the only Way to be happy. For, the true Good of Man, let us ſearch for it ever ſo long, or fancy about it what we pleaſe, can never be found where it is not; and is only where our Maker hath placed it. All our Capacities for it are of his beſtowing: our whole Being is at his Diſpoſal. If we withhold any Thing from him, the Holineſs of his Nature, the Honour of his Government, bind him to convince us of our Guilt and Folly. If, on the contrary, we reſign all to him, he will *give us* back *richly to enjoy*, as the Scripture expreſſes it [d], all that is innocent and ſafe: he will reward us eternally hereafter for abſtaining from what would hurt us even here: and it is inconceivably abſurd to imagine we can provide for our own Intereſts better, than by intruſting them with Him. Nor perhaps in general do Men imagine they can: but they ſee what is right, and dare not attempt it. A cowardly Apprehenſion of Pain in the Effort keeps us in the far worſe Pain of a divided State of Mind and Life. We avoid ſome Faults, and cannot prevail on ourſelves to avoid others. We reſolve againſt all Sin, it may be: but

[d] 1 Tim. vi. 17.

cannot

cannot reſolve againſt the Things that we know will lead us into Sin: ſo we leave Stumbling-blocks in our own Way, and undo every Thing as faſt as we do it. Then for a while Self-reflection cauſes bitter Remorſe, but immediately Self-indulgence brings forth new Tranſgreſſions; and, in this wretched Circle, we go round and round to our Deſtruction: whereas one thorough Determination, well kept, of yielding up all without Reſerve to God, would extricate us from this Labyrinth, and ſettle us in a firm State of inward Peace: the preſent Advantages of the Change would be great beyond Belief; the future, infinite: and thus the Self-denial our Saviour enjoins would appear to be the only true Self-love.

But then we muſt not think, that forming ſuch a Reſolution is all that we need in order to accompliſh it. A vain Opinion of our own Strength is one Part of the Self that we are to deny: elſe we ſhall never have Strength to any real good Purpoſe. Our bleſſed Lord aſſures us, that *without Him we can do nothing* [e]. St. *Paul* aſſures us, that *we are not ſufficient to think any Thing as of ourſelves* [f]. And repeated Experience hath given us all, I fear, too many

[e] John xv. 5. [f] 2 Cor. iii. 5.

Proofs

Proofs of this Truth. If then we are wicked, our only Way is, that, yielding to the Convictions of God's Word and Spirit, we apply in the Name of our bleſſed Redeemer for Power to *deny ourſelves and follow Him:* that through him, as our High Prieſt, we *preſent our* Souls and *Bodies a Sacrifice to God*[g], beſeeching him to accept the Gift, to take and keep Poſſeſſion of us. And though we think ourſelves ever ſo good, yet if we imagine we are become ſuch, or hope to continue ſuch, by our own Abilities, we deceive ourſelves, and *know nothing yet, as we ought to know*[h]. *By the Grace of God I am what I am,* ſaith the Apoſtle; *I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the Grace of God, which was with me*[i]. *I am crucified with Chriſt, nevertheleſs I live; yet not I, but Chriſt liveth in me, and I live by the Faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himſelf for me*[k]. Nay, laſtly, if we flatter ourſelves, that even by the Means of Help from above we have attained to a Perfection of Self-denial, or of any other Virtue, we miſtake our Condition, endanger our Humility, and neglecting to preſs forward,

[g] Rom xii. 1. [h] 1 Cor. viii. 2. [i] 1 Cor. xv. 10.
[k] Gal. ii. 20.

ſhall

ſhall be driven back. Indeed, though Perfection is aſcribed to Men in Scripture, by Way of Oppoſition to Characters wilfully and eſſentially defective[l], and of Compariſon with others of inferior Goodneſs[m], and in Reſpect of God's gracious Acceptation through Chriſt *Jeſus*[n]; yet, ſtrictly ſpeaking, the Hope of ever attaining it here is vain, notwithſtanding that the Sruggle to advance towards it ought to be inceſſant: for the nearer the Approach, the greater the Reward. But *who can ſay, I have made my Heart clean, I am pure from my Sin*[o]*? For there is not a juſt Man upon Earth, that doth Good, and ſinneth not*[p]. When we put off theſe Bodies, and not before, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in Part ſhall be done away*[q]. Our Underſtandings ſhall be throughly enlightened, our Affections completely purified, our Wills intirely conformed to that of our Heavenly Father; we ſhall love ourſelves only as bearing his Image, and *God ſhall be all in all*[r].

[l] Job viii. 20. ix. 22. [m] Job i. 1. [n] Col. i. 28.
[o] Prov. xx. 9. [p] Eccl. vii. 20. [q] 1 Cor. xiii. 10.
[r] 1 Cor. xv. 28.

SER-

# SERMON III.

TIT. ii. 6.

*Young Men likewiſe exhort to be ſober-minded.*

INſtructing Men to *remember their Creator in the Days of their Youth* [a], is laying in their Hearts the only Foundation of every Thing good and happy: but the Work is far from being completed, when the Foundation is laid. Not only the general Duties of Life are to be built upon it; but the particular Duties of every one's Condition in Life: for theſe of all others, we are moſt concerned, and yet often leaſt willing, to know and attend to. They ſhould therefore be drawn out, and laid before us as minutely as they well can: and each be called upon to ſtudy thoſe more eſpecially, which he is more eſpecially obliged to practiſe. Now as the ſeveral Tempers, Ranks, and Employments of Men, and the ſeveral Relations they

[a] Eccl. xii. 1.

ſtand in to each other, ſo their ſeveral Ages alſo, lay them under peculiar Obligations: for which Reaſon St. *Peter* and St. *John* in their Epiſtles addreſs themſelves to younger Perſons, and to elder ſeparately; and St. *Paul* in this Epiſtle directs *Titus* to do the ſame thing. But though both have much need of Admonition, yet the Young plainly need it moſt; as they are juſt entering into the World, with little Knowledge, leſs Experience, and yet ſcarcely ever any Diſtruſt; with lively Spirits and warm Paſſions to miſlead them, and Time to go a great Way wrong, if they do not go right. In the Spring-ſeaſon of Life, eſpecially as it advances towards Summer, whatever the Soil produces, (and the human Heart is fruitful of Evil) ſhoots out ſo faſt, that a few Days neglect of weeding and pruning, occaſions a viſible Alteration for the worſe. And therefore the utmoſt Care ſhould be taken then, to keep all in good Order, by the continual Exerciſe of that *Sobriety of Mind*, that conſiderate Self-government, which the Apoſtle preſcribes indeed to every one, but which they who principally want it, ought to underſtand as principally preſcribed to them. It is true, in this Verſe he mentions only *young Men:* but in the

preceding he had given the ſame Rule for young Women: and accordingly I ſhall ſpeak to both, without Diſtinction, in two Diſcourſes on this Subject.

I. The firſt and chief thing, in which young People are concerned to ſhew Sobriety of Mind, is moderating their natural Fondneſs for Pleaſure; and the two Sorts of Pleaſure, from which they are in Danger, are, ſenſual Gratifications, and gay Amuſements.

As to the former, St. *Paul* hath directed that *Fornication and all Uncleanneſs be not once named amongſt Chriſtians*[b]. And the leſs they are named, even to caution againſt them, the better: provided it be well underſtood and conſidered, that they not only fill the Lives of thoſe who are guilty of them, and of others, with a Variety of temporal Sufferings, too commonly experienced; but fatally indiſpoſe them to the Love of God and Virtue, and diſqualify them for the ſpiritual Happineſs of the World to come. Therefore *dearly beloved, I beſeech you, as Strangers and Pilgrims*, whoſe chief Intereſt lies not here, but in another State, *abſtain from fleſhly Luſts, which war againſt the Soul*[c]. All Ranks, both Sexes, how ſtrangely ſoever

[b] Eph. v. 3. [c] 1 Pet. ii. 11.

Multitudes of one ſeem to forget it, are equally bound by this Reſtraint: bound to avoid every thing likely to miſguide their Conduct, or to inflame their Deſires; and to employ their Thoughts ſo conſtantly on what is good or lawful, as to exclude from them what is bad. For by ſuch Care, early taken, the Preſervation of their Innocence will be eaſy: which, for want of it, is falſly imagined impoſſible. Thus then, to ſpeak in the Words of our Apoſtle, *Let every one know how to poſſeſs his Veſſel in Sanctification and Honour, not in the Luſt of Concupiſcence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God*[d]. And to that End, Let *every one*, as Solomon adviſes, *keep his Heart with all Diligence: for out of it are the Iſſues of Life*[e].

Together with the Sins of this Kind, thoſe of Intemperance in drinking, or even eating, which are cloſely connected with them, ought to be carefully ſhunned, as peculiarly oppoſite to the Character of *ſober-minded*, by young People; who of all others have the leaſt Need of ſuch Indulgences, and are the moſt hurt by them; ſubjected to painful and dangerous Diſeaſes; expoſed to early Diſtreſs in their Circumſtances; and beſides, for the moſt

[d] 1 Theſſ. iv. 4, 5. [e] Prov. iv. 23.

Part,

Part, either ſunk into Stupidity and Inſignificance, or raiſed into Wildneſs and Madneſs, frequently followed by proportionable Dejection and Melancholy. Therefore, inſtead of ſuch Exceſs, they muſt, as St. *Paul* farther directs, *keep under the Body and bring it into Subjection*[f]; not by hurtful or fanciful Auſterities, but by rational Self-denial: remembering, that even in common Exerciſes and Conteſts of Strength and Activity, *every Man, that ſtriveth for the Maſtery, is temperate in all Things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible Crown, but we an incorruptible*[g]. This and every Paſſage of Scripture, which admoniſhes to *flee youthful Luſts*[h], they muſt frequently read and recollect and pray over, as the moſt powerful Means to ſecure, and if they fall, to recover, themſelves. For *wherewithall ſhall a young Man cleanſe his Way? even by ruling himſelf after thy Word*[i].

The other Sort of Pleaſures, eſpecially dangerous to young People, are gay Amuſements. Undoubtedly Cheerfulneſs is as innocent, as it is amiable: it may and ſhould be expreſſed by thoſe that have it, and allowed and encouraged by thoſe who have it not: for it both gives

[f] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [g] v. 25. [h] 2 Tim. ii. 22. [i] Pſ. cxix. 9.

Delight, and doth good. The Diſpoſition to it was unqueſtionably planted in us by our Maker, with Intent that it ſhould be gratified: and Youth is plainly the natural Seaſon for it. But ſtill, all this by no Means exempts it from Diſcipline and Government. Suppoſe a Conſtitution or a Temper by Nature warm and cholerick ſhould be induſtriouſly or negligently farther heated, inſtead of being watched and moderated, what would be the Conſequence? Suppoſe that Gravity and Warineſs, which is as natural to old Age as Gaiety to Youth, ſhould for that Reaſon be carried on to its utmoſt Extent: plainly that would be wrong. Surely then the contrary Extreme is equally wrong. And indeed if we conſider the Make and Circumſtances of Man, we ſhall ſoon diſcover many Motives for keeping a ſtrict Hand upon our Inclinations to all the ſeveral Things which I have juſt mentioned.

Love of Pleaſure is undeniably one Part of our Nature: but Senſe of Duty, and Concern for laſting Happineſs, are as evident and much more important Parts: yet we muſt often trample upon theſe, if we always follow that. Immoderate Deſires of preſent Gratification, if we ſuffer them to be conſtantly ſolliciting us,

will

will frequently prevail when they ought not; and hurry us on ſuddenly, or intice us gradually, to ſuch Lengths as we never intended; poſſibly till our Heart is totally corrupted, and the Care of our Conduct intirely thrown aſide. Witneſs the many Examples of Diſpoſitions, that once promiſed better Things, betrayed by Indulgences merely indiſcreet at firſt, into groſs Vices, and ſometimes open Diſſoluteneſs. Now what ruins or impairs our Virtue, is in Proportion prejudicial to our Happineſs; even that preſent Happineſs, which the Votaries of Pleaſure are purſuing. Not only Reaſon proves this, if they would condeſcend to be reaſoned with, but daily Experience. How many have we all of us ſeen or heard of, who ſetting out with nothing worſe than a thoughtleſs Paſſion for Diverſion and Entertainment, have grievouſly, nay perhaps irrecoverably, injured, in a few Years, ſome their Healths or Fortunes, others their Characters and Peace of Mind; and treaſured up for the Remainder of their Days, Pain and Want, Remorſe and Shame, it may be artfully palliated, but ſeverely felt! Think then awhile, you that are young, and have Pity on yourſelves. Shall all this firm and vigorous

Strength, this Affluence of Circumſtances, this Eaſe of Heart and Openneſs of Face, this delightful Proſpect of being eſteemed and happy through the whole of Life; ſhall it, merely for want of a little Self-reſtraint, be caſt away in the very Entrance upon Life, and exchanged for Guilt and Miſery, to abide with you during the reſt of it? For theſe are the natural Fruits of ſuch Neglect: and it is the weakeſt Vanity, to hope that you ſhall eſcape better than others, unleſs you keep ſafe upon firm Ground.

Or ſuppoſe you come off ever ſo much better than you had Cauſe to expect: ſtill making Pleaſure you main Buſineſs muſt hinder you, firſt from preparing for, then from attending to, the proper Employments of your Station: by which alone you muſt be great Sufferers, and probably others beſides you. But farther; indulging, and, by Indulgence, adding Force to Deſires of this Kind, ſpoils and vitiates the inward Frame, juſt as feeding too freely on Meats of high Reliſh doth the bodily Appetite. Common Food quickly becomes inſipid: and in a little Time we are ſurfeited of what pleaſed us moſt. Then follow ſickly Longings for we ſcarce know what: and the Concluſion is abhorring and nauſeating every Thing.

Thing. So it is with the Mind. They who muſt always have ſomewhat extremely delicious to fill up their Hours, reject as flat and taſteleſs a Number of Things, with which others are very well entertained. What they themſelves were entertained with once, after a while grows cloying: and as the World is not formed to afford exquiſite Novelties frequently, they have miſerable Intervals of eager wiſhing for Delight, which if they ſeem now and then to obtain, their Satisfaction in them very ſoon deadens away to nothing. And thus they waſte their Days in the Affectation of wonderful Felicity, but in the real Suffering of moſt wearieſome Satiety and Liſtleſſneſs. Human Nature is not fitted to ſupport a perpetual Flutter of Jollity and Mirth: Which, like ſpirituous Liquors, may appear at the Inſtant to raiſe and enliven thoſe who uſe them; but, generally ſpeaking, will ſoon wear them out, and ſink them down into a deplorable State of Languor and Lowneſs; from which at length the moſt pernicious Augmentation of the Doſe will ſcarce afford them a Moment's Relief.

Therefore be perſuaded to look forward a little, and attend to Conſequences. Let the Love of Pleaſure importune you ever ſo ſtrongly;

ſtrongly; ſtill, how delightful ſoever the Draught is, to ſwallow it can never be all, that a thirſty Perſon hath to conſider. It muſt be a much more material Queſtion, whether no Miſchief will enſue. Miſtake not the Beginning of Life for the Whole. Providence in great Wiſdom hath furniſhed every Period of it with proper Satisfactions of its own, and proper Employments for the Service of the next. Youth is to prepare us for the comfortable Enjoyment of Manhood: Manhood for that of old Age: each Part of our Exiſtence on Earth for the Bleſſedneſs of Heaven. Second the Intention, purſue the Direction of your gracious Maker; and be aſſured you will never find your Account in contradicting it. You reliſh only ſuch and ſuch Things at preſent; but provide for the Feelings you will have hereafter; and, like thoſe who are to travel through different Climates, lay in for them all, what the knowing and prudent adviſe. Suppoſe in your Childhood you had done whatever was then agreeable to you, and Nothing elſe: how ſad a Figure muſt your Youth have made! Why, juſt as contemptible and wretched will your riper Age be, if you follow that Rule now.

Or

Or could you eſcape all Inconveniences here from ſuch Behaviour; yet, as you cannot think this even a moral, much leſs a religious Manner of Life, you may be ſure it muſt end ill hereafter. You were created, not merely to pleaſe yourſelves, but to ſerve your Fellow-creatures, and honour your Maker. You have Faculties given you for theſe Purpoſes: you are to account for the Uſe of them. They are become by the Fall of our firſt Parents weak and inſufficient: you have uſed them ill; and made your Condition yet worſe. A Method of Pardon and Recovery is offered to you; but offered on Terms of deep Repentance, humble Faith in a Redeemer, diligent Care to preſerve yourſelves from Sin, to improve yourſelves in Goodneſs: eternal Rewards are promiſed to ſuch as thus become qualified for them; eternal Puniſhments are threatened to thoſe, who are *Lovers of Pleaſure more than Lovers of God*[k]. Think well of this: and run mad after them if you can. *Rejoice, O young Man in thy Youth, and walk in the Ways of thy Heart, and in the Sight of thine Eyes: but know thou, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into Judgment*[l]. *Solomon* doth not forbid here all

[k] 2 Tim. iii. 4. [l] Eccl. xi. 9.

Uſe

Uſe of worldly Gratifications, but all ſuch Uſe as we cannot anſwer for.

Therefore allow yourſelves in fit Inſtances of Pleaſure, at fit Seaſons, to a fit Degree; and enjoy them with a merry Heart: but never let the Thought of living to Pleaſure get the leaſt Poſſeſſion of you. Be induſtrious to check ſo abſurd and deſtructive an Imagination, by diligent Application to ſome proper Buſineſs, and fixing a frequent Return of Hours devoted to retired and ſerious Recollection. The mere Compoſure and Quiet of them will be no ſmall Advantage to you: but you will find it a much greater, to ſtop from Time to Time, and ſee whereabouts you are; to conſider whether you are fallen into no wrong Courſe; whether you make any Progreſs in the right; whether any Danger be near, whether you are taking the beſt Method to avoid it. No Joy on Earth can exceed that of anſwering theſe Queſtions well. And if any Thing be otherwiſe than well, knowing it, is the only Way to mend it, and that, the only Way to inward Peace: of which our gracious God and Father is willing that they, who have moſt offended him, ſhould on their ſincere Repentance and Reformation immediately partake. Therefore often examine your own Condition:

and

and at ſuch Times alſo, turn off your Eyes a little from the gay Scenes of Life; take the other Parts of it into View, and conſider on the whole, what this World is. A very different Place, from what thoſe who are intoxicated with youthful Warmth and ſanguine Expectations, for a while imagine it to be. Set therefore in your View the Diſappointments and Perplexities, the Cares and Fatigues, the Pains and Sorrows, of which you amongſt the reſt of Mankind muſt undergo your Share: and while the Appearance of Things is brighteſt, as the wiſe King directs, *remember the Days of Darkneſs, for they ſhall be many*[m]. Not that you are to break your Spirits or damp your Activity, by melancholy Proſpects and Apprehenſions; but only to compoſe your Hearts into a State ſuitable to that which you live in, and form your Minds to be content with few and low Enjoyments from the Things around you: for in ſuch a World as this, it is certain Miſery to aim at high Happineſs.

Still Prudence may ſecure you a good Degree of Comfort here: and Religion will exalt it into Joy. For to the pious Soul Light will ariſe out of Darkneſs; and all the Vanity

[m] Eccl. xi. 8.

and

and Vexation of the preſent Life give Aſſurance to thoſe, who go through it as they ought, that God will make them ample Amends in a better. Therefore in your Hours of private Meditation, fail not to renew the Remembrance of your Creator; think of all you enjoy as his Gift; think of all his Laws as kind and neceſſary Proviſions for your temporal or eternal Welfare; think of every Tranſgreſſion as the groſſeſt Folly, mixed with the baſeſt Ingratitude; and have *Joſeph*'s Reply in Readineſs for every Temptation, *How can I do this great Wickedneſs, and ſin againſt God*[a]? Fervent Devotion from a pure Heart is undoubtedly the moſt pleaſing of all Employments: for it is the Exerciſe of the ſweeteſt Affections, Hope and Love on the worthieſt of Objects; a Being infinitely able, and equally attentive, to reward our Attachments to him, to defend us from every real Evil, to beſtow on us every real Good, and in due Time the full Enjoyment of the ſupreme Good, himſelf. Therefore warm but your Hearts with theſe delightful Sentiments; and you will never repine at any needful Reſtraints from earthly Gratifications. Only preſerve in your Piety

[a] Gen. xxxix. 9.

itſelf

itſelf that Soberneſs of Mind, which is requiſite in every Thing: that it may not fly out into Raptures of Enthuſiaſm, or Zeal without Charity; but may be uniformly rational, mild and beneficent.

This Article of moderating their Love of Pleaſure, is of ſuch ſingular Importance to the Young, that I could not avoid enlarging upon it much more, than I ſhall on any of the reſt.

II. A ſecond Inſtance, in which they have great Need to be *ſober-minded*, is their Deſire of imitating others; and doing many Things in Compliance with Faſhion, to which they would otherwiſe have no Inclination. Now conforming to thoſe around us in Points of Indifference, is one commendable Part of ſocial Behaviour. And moderately abſurd Cuſtoms, if they be harmleſs, it is very allowable, when once they become general, to follow and deſpiſe at the ſame Time. But if you catch yourſelves growing really fond of ſuch Things, running to the utmoſt Lengths of them, and building to yourſelves a Kind of Reputation upon them; then it is high Time to ſtop, indeed to retreat. For attending to Trifles will take off, in Proportion, your Attention

tention to Matters of Moment: and if your Eſteem be miſplaced, your Lives will be miſled. But, above all, beware of yielding, where it may more immediately endanger your Innocence: beware of that Indifference to Religion and religious Duties, which of late hath appeared ſo peculiarly infectious; beware of being led inſenſibly into ſuch a Turn of Talk and Behaviour, ſuch Methods of employing your Thoughts and your Time, however polite they are accounted, as may weaken your Regard to the Principles of Virtue. Always examine the Rules of Cuſtom by thoſe of God's Word, of Reaſon and Experience; and where you have Cauſe to diſtruſt your own Judgment, adhere to that of prudent Friends, if need were, againſt the World. But indeed it is generally a ſmall Part of the World, a few forward empty People, that make the high Vogue in every Thing, and are followed thoughtleſly by others. Be not deceived therefore by the Self-ſufficiency, Noiſe and vain Shew, of Wretches like theſe; nor ever miſtake their Opinion for the Senſe of Mankind: but be aſſured, many more will eſteem you for right Conduct, than wrong; and even the ſilent Approbation of the Wiſe and Good will do you much more Service, than the loudeſt

loudeſt Applauſes of the Inconſiderate and the Libertine. You may be afraid perhaps of the Cenſure or Ridicule of the latter: but only take Care to be pious and regular without Oſtentation or Sourneſs, and by acquiring, as far as you can, every laudable Accompliſhment, to make Amends for wanting that of being wicked; and there will be ſmall Doubt of your receiving much better Quarter from ſuch, than they commonly give one another. At leaſt, if you cannot *prevent* their Scorn, ſurely you may ſtand againſt it, and deſpiſe it: or, if your Mind be too tender for that, as in ſome young People it is, you have another Remedy, as obvious and eaſy as it is neceſſary; keep out of the Way of hearing it. Allow the moſt agreeable Perſons, that would weaken your Senſe of Duty, as little Familiarity with you as ever you can: and ſtrengthen yourſelves in Goodneſs continually, by the Example, the Countenance, the Encouragement, the Advice, of ſerious and diſcreet and amiable Companions.

3. A third Thing which due Sobriety of Mind requires, eſpecially of the Young, is to avoid Affectation: pretending, and endeavouring without Cauſe, to be what they are not, and to like or diſlike what they na-

turally do not. While any Thing continues in Faſhion, they, beyond others, are hurried away by a ſtrange Deſire of appearing much fonder of it, not only than there is Ground to be, (which belongs to the laſt Head) but than they really are: and often behave ſillily, and ſometimes wickedly, to expreſs their Paſſion for Things, which at the Bottom they have none for; at leaſt hardly any other, than what they took up, merely becauſe they thought it looked well; and can eaſily lay down again at the ſhorteſt Warning, as Experience ſhews, and be juſt as highly delighted with any Thing elſe. Now plainly ſuch as theſe proſtitute their Share of good Senſe to whatever happens to be the reigning Folly. And there are too many others, who though perhaps very zealous againſt theſe public Affectations, have their private ones, to which they allow full Scope. I am ſenſible, that Matters of this Nature may ſeem beneath the Notice of this Place: but nothing is ſo, which produces real Evils in Life. It is very true, in young Minds, as in warm and light Soils, Numbers of Weeds will ſpring up. But if they are nurſed and cheriſhed, inſtead of being rooted out, they will exhauſt the Ground, and choak the

the good Seed. Therefore examine whatever you perceive within you, rather with the greater Care for its being of your own Growth: and never tolerate ſtrong Fancies with weak Reaſons for them. Do not imagine Things graceful, or important, or proper, without knowing why: or that you can ever make them ſo, if they are not ſo: or that any Way whatever, of thinking, behaving, or appearing, is in the leaſt the better for your adopting it. Some perhaps may for a while, injudiciouſly or artfully, applaud your Peculiarities: they may procure you much Notice, and ſeemingly of a favourable Kind; but this will never end well. You will get a wrong Bias, and loſe the true Notion of the Value of Things; will lay yourſelves open to the Deſigns of the Crafty, fall into Contempt with the Diſcerning, and by Degrees with every one. Youth indeed hath Advantages, which may partly conceal, partly excuſe, theſe Abſurdities: but then they will fix upon you, and remain with you, after every Thing that can palliate them is gone. You will have put on a Character, under a falſe Notion of its becoming you, and not know how to lay it aſide, even when it miſbecomes you moſt notoriouſly;

toriouſly. And if all Affectation be thus bad, how dreadful is that monſtrous Affectation of Profaneneſs and Vice, not uncommonly ſeen in Perſons who perhaps would like full as well to be pious and virtuous, if they could but believe it would make near ſo genteel a Figure! But venture to believe, that a blameleſs Conduct, though it will not raiſe ſo early or ſo great a Talk about you, will, ſooner or later, diſtinguiſh you to your Advantage, which nothing elſe can: or, however the World may overlook you at preſent, God will do you abundant Honour hereafter. *Whatſoever thou takeſt in Hand, remember the End, and thou ſhalt never do amiſs* [o].

4. The fourth Particular comprehended under St. *Paul*'s general Direction for young People in the Text, and the laſt that can be mentioned now, I ſhall expreſs in his own Words: *Not to think of themſelves more highly than they ought to think, but to think ſoberly* [p]. Livelineſs and Want of Experience peculiarly diſpoſe them to err in this Point; and the ſuperficial Education, the Diſregard to all Authority, Human or Divine, and the Liberty and the Practice of ſaying and doing what

[o] Ecclus vii. 39. [p] Rom. xii. 3.

every

every one pleaſes, that prevail in the preſent Age, have heightened and ſpread the Error to Degrees never known before. Hence they perpetually deſpiſe the moſt uſeful Qualifications, and the worthieſt Behaviour; admire Trifles, Follies, and Sins, as Diſtinctions and Excellencies; claim a high Merit for Accompliſhments of which they have little or no Share; imagine themſelves totally free from Defects that are moſt glaringly viſible in them; pity and ſcorn thoſe whom they have more Cauſe to envy: and thus, judging falſly, in the moſt dangerous Manner, of Things and Perſons, others and themſelves, are utterly miſled in the main Concerns of Life. Yet they fail not to ſee, but take a Pride in obſerving, from Time to Time, that this is the Caſe of ſuch and ſuch of their Acquaintance: now, would they but reflect, that it *may* be their own too, it would be no inconſiderable Step towards a Cure. It muſt put them on examining what Advantages and good Qualities they are really poſſeſſed of, what the real Value of them is, what Deductions are to be made from them on Account of Imperfections and Failings, and what Ground they have, on the whole, to hope for the Eſteem of wiſe Men, and the

Acceptance of an all-wiſe God. It muſt remind them to conſider over again the haſty Judgments of their early Days, and review, with a ſuſpicious Eye, perhaps many Notions which they are very well ſatisfied in, without knowing why, and are proceeding to act upon at all Adventures. Moſt People indeed ſhould have more Diffidence than they have, but the Young much more than others. It is not natural, it is not poſſible, that, in the very Entrance of Life, one who hath taken no Pains to know any Thing ſhould know every Thing. And therefore when ſuch are found, as they are very Day, perfectly contented with themſelves; abſolutely clear, that their own Way of thinking and acting, whatever it chances to be, is right; when they will venture, in Queſtions of the greateſt Moment, to decide, without the leaſt Heſitation beforehand, or the leaſt Doubt afterwards, perhaps directly contrary to what the ableſt Perſons in all Ages have done; and hold every one in utter Contempt, that can poſſibly be of another Opinion; this is ſurely an aſtoniſhing Want of Sobriety of Mind. At leaſt be a little modeſt, till you can truly ſay, that you have conſidered and inquired with ſome Care: for

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afterwards, in all Likelihood, you will be ſo of Courſe. Eſpecially be modeſt, in Proportion as any Point is of Conſequence, and out of your Reach. For Inſtance, in Religion. The Duties of it are plain, and plainly reaſonable. So are the Doctrines too, as far as we can underſtand them, and judge of them: but we can underſtand and judge of ſome of them but very imperfectly. They relate to the infinite Nature of God, to the boundleſs Views of his Providence, to future Times, it may be a future World. No Wonder, that of ſuch Things we do not comprehend the whole; though he may have good Reaſons, whether we perceive them or not, for telling us Part: and yet, without comprehending the whole, ſome Parts muſt ſeem unaccountable. Now ſuch Difficulties as theſe, or poſſibly leſs, a raw ſelf-ſufficient Youth chances to think or be told of, runs away with them, and derides the Weakneſs of thoſe who believe what they are taught. But can it poſſibly make any Doctrine of Religion doubtful, that Perſons, bred up in the Manner that, God knows, too many are, and living afterwards as may be expected, do not underſtand it, or do not like it, or have heard more of the Objections againſt it than the Arguments for it? Or

ſhould they not rather learn to ſuſpect, that they have not a ſufficient Acquaintance with the Subject? For what will become of good Senſe and right Behaviour in the World, if People are to think themſelves Maſters of every Thing which they know but any Thing of, and to deſpiſe every Thing they know Nothing of? This is both a very unreaſonable and very immoral Turn of Mind: it deſtroys all Reverence for Truth, all Attention to the virtuous Conduct of their Faculties and their Lives: it leads them, for the moſt Part, to early Miſery here, and hardens them beyond all Things againſt that penitent Conviction, which alone can prevent their Miſery hereafter. Juſtly therefore doth the Prophet denounce: *Wo unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil: that put Darkneſs for Light, and Light for Darkneſs. Wo unto them that are wiſe in their own Eyes, and prudent in their own Sight.—Therefore, as the Fire deveureth the Stubble, and the Flame conſumeth the Chaff: ſo their Root ſhall be as Rottenneſs, and their Bloſſom go up as the Duſt; becauſe they have caſt away the Law of the Lord of Hoſts, and deſpiſed the Word of the Holy One of Iſrael* [9].

[9] Iſa. v. 20, 21, 24.

SERMON

# SERMON IV.

TIT. ii. 6.

*Young Men likewiſe exhort to be ſober-minded.*

IN diſcourſing on theſe Words, I have already mentioned four Particulars, in reſpect of which it is peculiarly neceſſary for young Perſons to preſerve Sobriety of Mind, and exerciſe a watchful Government over themſelves: their natural Gaiety and Love of Pleaſure, their Fondneſs for imitating the Cuſtoms and Faſhions of the World at ſome Times, their Proneneſs to Affectation and wrong Singularities at others, and their almoſt univerſal Inclination to entertain too high an Opinion of their own Advantages, Accompliſhments, and Abilities. Were this Opinion to go no farther than their own Breaſts, it would be a great Fault, and have very bad Effects: but when it is ſhewn to others, and even demands their Notice, the Caſe becomes much

much worſe. And therefore an additional indiſpenſable Duty, comprehended under the Character of *ſober-minded*, is,

5. That how well ſoever they may apprehend they ſee Cauſe to think of themſelves, they ſhould behave with Humility towards thoſe with whom they have any Intercourſe: and remember that, in young People above all, Modeſty is exceedingly graceful, and a remarkable Want of it ſhocking. It is not meant that they ſhould be frighted, confuſed, and diſconcerted in what they ſay or do before Strangers and Superiors: this would be a Weakneſs; though, when it doth not go very far, an amiable one. Much leſs is it meant to enjoin ſo ſtrict a Silence or Reſerve, as may bring the Goodneſs of their Underſtandings or Tempers in Queſtion: but only, that their Words, Looks, and Actions, ſhould expreſs a Conſciouſneſs of what is very true, that they have Reaſon, from their Youth and Inexperience, to be in ſome Degree ſuſpicious of themſelves, even where they ſeem to be moſt plainly in the right. Still, what they are fully convinced, on deliberate Conſideration, is their Duty, they muſt adhere to, ſo long as the Perſuaſion continues, though Perſons,

ever

ever ſo much farther advanced in Age or Knowledge, diſſuade them from it. But even in this Caſe, and certainly then in others, they ought to ſhew every Mark of due Regard to thoſe from whom they differ. And the moſt obliging Submiſſion is very conſiſtent with Livelineſs and Spirit: it may give ſtrong Proofs of Dignity, at the ſame Time with Reſpect; and by throwing the moſt advantageous Light on every Accompliſhment, it will pleaſe every one worth pleaſing, beyond all Things.

It is very true, that quite different Methods, a confident Behaviour, and a Manner, in Converſation, bold even to great Lengths of Indecency, ſeem to take with too many: even with ſome, who cover their Ignorance or Neglect of true good Breeding and Politeneſs, with high Pretences to both. But then, as the Liking which they have, or pretend to have, for theſe undaunted Spirits, can be accompanied with no real Eſteem, ſo it ſeldom holds long; and yet ſeldomer either produces or intends any Good to thoſe who are diſtinguiſhed by it. For Perſons of Judgment will by no Means pitch on thoſe for any Purpoſe of Importance, with whoſe empty Forwardneſs they

they are moſt diverted for an idle Hour. The very Quality, that recommends them in this latter Reſpect, is an inſuperable Objection againſt them in the former.

Another Thing ought to be obſerved, which in our Youth, at leaſt, we commonly overlook; that they, who love to be often placing themſelves in full View, whatever Care they take about their Appearance, are apt to have more ſeen of them, than is to their Advantage. And this Danger is the greater, as whoever deſires too earneſtly to make the beſt Figure he can, will almoſt certainly be carried on to aim at making a better than he can, and of Conſequence will make a much worſe than he needs. Great Numbers, who might have paſſed through Life with abundantly ſufficient Approbation and Regard, by the mere Help of plain good Senſe and good Temper, have, by affecting more Agreeableneſs or Sprightlineſs, more Judgment or Knowledge, perhaps than they had, or however than they had Occaſion to ſhew, become ridiculous to thoſe whom they wanted to think highly of them. But a farther, and more ſerious Evil, is, that where the Paſſion for being remarkable is permitted to grow very ſtrong, if laudable Methods will

not

not bring it about, People are ſorely tempted to uſe others: to procure Admiration of their Perſons by improper Arts and Freedoms, of their Learning by Aſſertions of groundleſs Novelties, of their Wit by Ill-nature or Profaneneſs. And yet after all, generally ſpeaking, theſe Contrivances prove inſufficient. Traps, laid for Applauſe, are almoſt always ſeen; and ſo diſguſt thoſe who ſee them, that they often refuſe even real Merit its due Acknowledgements, when they are too openly claimed. Now and then indeed theſe vain Characters do puſh themſelves into early Reputation, without any Title to it. But, as their haſty Growth is unaccompanied with inward Strength, after being a ſhort Time gazed at and envied, they are cruſhed under the Weight of their own Fame, and ſink back into Nothing; while every one rejoices at their Fall, and wonders how they came ever to riſe ſo high in the Eſteem of the World.

On all Accounts therefore young Men ought ever to expreſs, in their whole Converſation and Demeanour, a moderate Opinion and Diſtruſt of themſelves; with no ſmall Eſteem and Deference for others, how far ſoever they may be from making a ſhowy Appearance.

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For ſtill, ſuch Perſons may have a great deal more even of ornamental Accompliſhments, to produce on fit Occaſions, than you are aware of. Or ſuppoſing them not at all comparable to you in theſe Reſpects, they may excel you in much more important Things; in good Conduct, Virtue, and Piety. Whatever Advantages you have over any one beſides theſe, remember it depends intirely on your Uſe of them, whether you ſhall be the better or the worſe for them: and be aſſured, they will never be truly beneficial to you, without Humility of Heart and Behaviour. Inſtead therefore of the unprofitable and unſafe Employment of admiring yourſelves, and endeavouring to make others admire you, for Qualities of ſmall and doubtful Value, indulge but a moderate Complacence in the very beſt that you conceive you are poſſeſſed of; think how imperfect you are in them, how many others you want, how many bad ones you have; and far from cheriſhing the poor Vanity of vying with thoſe around you, proſtrate yourſelves before God, and earneſtly beſeech him to turn his Face *from your Sins, and put out all your Miſdeeds; to make you a clean Heart, and renew a right Spirit within you*[a].

[a] Pſ. li. 9, 10.

6. Another

6. Another Duty, comprehended under Sobriety of Mind, and cloſely connected with the former, conſiſts in avoiding inconſiderate and vehement Poſitiveneſs in Diſcourſe; to which the Young, who think well of their own Judgments, and know little of what others have judged or on what Grounds, are much addicted. Now affirming any Thing, as more certain than you have good Cauſe to believe it, is really an Offence againſt Truth, though you ſhould happen to be in the Right; and peculiarly unbecoming in thoſe, who are moſt likely to be often in the Wrong. Inſiſting on a Point too earneſtly ſometimes provokes very dangerous Reſentments, eſpecially when two of the ſame warm Temper are of different Perſuaſions. And cooler and wiſer Men will ſeldom care to venture upon giving you Information, when they ſee you ſo little diſpoſed to receive it. For want of ſuch Monitors, you will often go on, for a long Time, aſſerting as unqueſtionable, what is falſe or doubtful. Others will perceive it ſoon: you will be forced to ſee it yourſelves at laſt: and then what Shame and Vexation will you have brought upon your own Heads! Whereas propoſing your Notions with an ingenuous Diffidence will ſecure an eaſy Re-

treat, if they chance to be confuted; and urging your Reaſons, when they are ſtrongeſt, with Modeſty of Speech, will make you beloved, as well as admired. You ſhould therefore conſtantly bear in your Thoughts, and imitate, the engaging Behaviour of *Elihu* in *Job:* who, having firſt waited till his Elders had ſpoken, *anſwered and ſaid: I am young, and ye are old: wherefore I was afraid, and durſt not ſhew you my Opinion. I ſaid, Days ſhould ſpeak, and Multitude of Years ſhould teach Wiſdom. But there is a Spirit in Man: and the Inſpiration of the Almighty giveth them Underſtanding: therefore hearken to me: I alſo will ſhew you my Opinion* [b].

7. A ſeventh Inſtance of Sobriety of Mind, yet more important than the former, indeed ſo viſibly important that a few Words will ſuffice about it, is guarding carefully againſt Raſhneſs in Conduct. Words may paſs over, and prove of ſmall Importance; but Actions are always of moment: and yet the Young too commonly act without Scruple or Diſtruſt. Sometimes this ariſes from the Pride of thinking, that they cannot act amiſs: but ſometimes alſo from mere Thoughtleſſneſs,

[b] Job xxxii. 6, 7, 8, 10.

or

or a lively Impatience of Deliberation, joined with that peculiar enterprising Diſpoſition, and Unwillingneſs to believe any Harm will follow, which Youth inſpires, and riper Years find bitter Reaſon to lament. For indeed, what one Thing is there dreadful in Life, which this adventurous Giddineſs doth not frequently bring on Men, in the very Beginning of their Days, and it may be fix down upon them to the End? You, of all others, ought to be cautious: for you have much to loſe, even in this World; and to plunge at the firſt Step into Miſery is a deplorable Thing. You muſt be ſenſible, that Multitudes have done ſo, and Multitudes are doing ſo every Day, through mere Negligence, perhaps but a little Negligence: and if you are guilty of as much or more, how can you hope to eſcape better? It will coſt you far leſs Time and Trouble to avoid Errors, than to retrieve them. Some cannot be retrieved at all: others, but imperfectly. With your beſt Care you will find it hard enough to keep intirely clear of them: and what then muſt become of thoſe, who profeſſedly take no Care at all, but give up their Lives to Fancy and Chance?

8. Another Point, in which it is very uncommon, and yet very needful for young People

to be ſober-minded, is, in moderating their natural Haſtineſs of Temper, and Readineſs to take Offence. It is in vain to think of reckoning up all the Occaſions, on which this Fault appears in them: but ſome ought to be mentioned particularly.

One is, that they are too commonly provoked at receiving Advice, and reſent it as an Affront. Now if it be given, as it certainly is for the moſt Part, ſolely or chiefly from Good-will to you: what a monſtrous, what a barbarous Thing it is, to wound the Hearts of your beſt Friends doubly; firſt by your Indiſcretions, then by your Ingratitude: to tell them, that is no Concern of theirs, which they cannot help being moſt tenderly concerned about; and inſiſt on the Right you have, to ruin yourſelves, if you pleaſe! But perhaps they take upon them, not only to adviſe you, but be angry with you: and that you cannot bear. Now it is very poſſible, their Anger, or however the Degree, or Time, or Manner of expreſſing it, may be improper: or, on the other hand, it may be more neceſſary, than you imagine, or care to own. But at leaſt, it is a Proof that they mean you well: elſe, why ſhould they give themſelves any Diſquiet about you? And even if

they do miſtake in ſome Things, or go too far in their Fears for you, ſtill the Reaſon of their Sollicitude is ſo kind, that the Exceſs of it may well be excuſed. Or ſuppoſe it not to proceed from Affection, but from what you will, Conceit, Cenſoriouſneſs, Hatred, if you pleaſe; it will be well worth your while, to attend to it ſo far however, as to make your Advantage of it, by amending or vindicating or guarding yourſelf. And if they, who give you good Advice, be your Enemies, it will be much better to grieve them by taking it, than to pleaſe them by perſiſting in Sins or Follies.

There is a farther Inſtance of Warmth of Temper in young People, which frequently hath very bad Conſequences, though it proceeds from an excellent Principle. They ſet out with the livelieſt Senſe of Right and Wrong in many Caſes: would God it were the ſame in all! They have uſually a ſtrong Abhorrence of doing unworthy Things for the Sake of Intereſt: and it is great Pity, they have not an equal Abhorrence of doing as unworthy Things for the ſake of Pleaſure and Applauſe. But this Averſion to Baſeneſs and Unfairneſs, (though it can never be too deeply rooted, and to begin the World with Indifference in theſe Reſpects

is a very bad Sign, yet,) if they are naturally of eager Spirits, hurries them on into moſt grievous Errors. In publick Affairs they grow hot-headed and outrageous; inattentive to the Weight of thoſe Reaſons, and the Merit of thoſe Perſons, that are againſt them; impatient to take the worſt of Methods, that promiſe but the Attainment of their imagined good Ends; in ſhort, exceſſively unreaſonable and injurious; and all with an Intention of acting the honeſteſt and nobleſt Part that can be. In private Life the ſame immoderate Warmth prompts them to conceive ſudden and furious Antipathies on the ſlighteſt Foundations: to magnify ſmall Faults or none into unpardonable Crimes; and purſue the ſuppoſed Offender with moſt unrighteous Reſentment, miſtaking it all the while for juſt Indignation. Now Men of ſuch vehement Diſpoſitions, which exert their Vehemence chiefly in the Seaſon of Youth, if they have any Reflection, cannot help knowing their Danger: and therefore ſhould conſcientiouſly and perpetually be on their Watch againſt it: ſhould think ſeriouſly in their cooler Hours, how much the Miſrepreſentations of others, how much more the Violence of their own Natures, may diſguiſe Things to them; and, it

may

may be, have actually done it many Times already: think what Imperfections there are, in the Minds and Behaviour even of thoſe who are well-diſpoſed, in their own amongſt the reſt: think, even ſuppoſing the Things, or the Perſons, they are angry with, very bad, whether the Bitterneſs of their Anger may not be as bad: think how much better and ſafer it is, to lean towards the milder Side; and how exceedingly blameable they will have been, ſhould all this Heat, or a conſiderable Part of it, prove at laſt to be groundleſs and unjuſt. But, next to the Danger of unreaſonable Averſions, ought to be mentioned,

9. That of unreaſonable Fondneſſes: againſt which the Young, if they will preſerve a due Sobriety of Mind, muſt always be ſtrictly on their Guard. They have had little Opportunity for, and therefore can have little Skill in, a Part of Knowledge, that requires a great deal, judging of Characters. And yet they will enter all at once into ſuch boſom Friendſhips with almoſt mere Strangers, as a prudent Perſon would ſcarce contract with thoſe, whom he had known longeſt. Sometimes theſe ſudden Intimacies end in as ſudden Quarrels. And when they laſt longer, the Caſe is often

yet worſe. The Favourites, choſen ſo haſtily, are for the moſt Part ill choſen: and when a Confidence without Reſerve (for Youth hath very little Reſerve) is placed in thoſe, who either deſign, or only judge amiſs; in how many Reſpects may they miſguide, to what Contempt may they expoſe, to what fatal Errors may they lead, their inconſiderate Admirers! Therefore beware of plauſible Inſinuations and agreeable Appearances: allow none to put themſelves upon you for what they pleaſe; but examine them well, and always conſult your old and ſure Friends in the Choice of new ones. Indeed if you never chuſe any, perhaps it may be no Harm. Familiar Acquaintance you may have with many. A proper Degree of Truſt you may repoſe in ſome. But your Life may paſs, without meeting with one, to whom you can with Safety open your Heart intirely. And moſt of the pretended ſtrict Friendſhips are mere intereſted Combinations in the Elder, and a Mixture of fond Fancy and Affectation in the Younger. Therefore keep on the watch; and particularly againſt thoſe, whom perhaps you are leaſt apt to ſuſpect, who expreſs the moſt Complaiſance to you, and are the fulleſt of

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your Praiſes, eſpecially to your Face. If this Behaviour be owing to Weakneſs, they are unworthy of your Eſteem: if to Deſign, they are dangerous. For the Scripture hath ſaid, *a Man that flattereth his Neighbour, ſpreadeth a Net for his Feet*[c]. Inſtead therefore of running into the Arms of ſuch, keep them at a Diſtance. And with whomſoever you enter into a cloſer Connexion, continue ſtill to obſerve, with Candor indeed, but with Vigilance too, how they conduct themſelves, what Impreſſions they are making upon you: nor think it any Breach either of Fidelity or Good-nature, to part with the deareſt Friend upon Earth, rather than endanger your Piety, your Virtue, your Happineſs, or even your Character. Farther yet; carefully avoid the Weakneſs and Injuſtice of extolling your Intimates too highly, either in your Diſcourſe or even your Imagination, and diſparaging others in Compariſon: but ſtill more carefully avoid promoting their Intereſts in Oppoſition to Reaſon and Equity, to private Right or publick Good.

10. Another Part of Sobriety of Mind, highly and peculiarly requiſite for the Young, is a diſcreet Management of their Expences. Covet-

[c] Prov. xxix. 5.

ouſneſs indeed, hateful and deſpicable as it is in the Elder, would be ſomewhat worſe in them: but all is not Covetouſneſs, that they are apt to call ſo: and Extravagance is a Mark only of Folly, not of Generoſity, or Good-nature. They, who ſquander needleſly at ſome Times, will be driven to ſpare improperly at others, when they ſhould have been bountiful: and ſo will make a truly mean Figure, becauſe they would needs make a falſly great one. Then, if their Profuſeneſs riſe to any Height, it creates them great Uneaſineſs with their Parents and Friends: whom it always fills with Fears about them, and frequently ſtraitens and diſtreſſes: it occaſions (as they muſt run in Debt) Difficulties and Loſſes, oftentimes Ruin, to thoſe, with whom they have Dealings; and uſually to ſuch of them, as deſerve it leaſt: they muſt bring themſelves into continual Perplexities: they will of Courſe be tempted, either to drown the Senſe of them by Intemperance, or to aim at getting out of them by diſhoneſt Arts and Methods, of one Kind or another; yet probably in vain. And if they come to have Families, they will in all Likelihood utterly undo thoſe, who ought to have been the Object of their tendereſt Love and Care.

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Remember therefore to ſet out cautiouſly: conſider well, that to riſe in your Way of Living is very eaſy; but to lower it, one of the hardeſt Things in the World: and lay it down for a Rule, that no Income whatever can ſupport Negligence and Expenſiveneſs.

11. The eleventh Proof, which young Perſons ſhould give of a ſober and reaſonable Mind is to fix upon, and keep cloſely to, ſome fit Manner of ſpending their Time. For none of it is given us to be thrown away: and unleſs they apply early to what they ought, a Habit of Idleneſs will ſoon take firm Poſſeſſion of them. To thoſe of lower Rank, Neceſſity reads the daily Leſſon of Induſtry: it will make their Condition comfortable and reputable: and if they think of being maintained at their Eaſe, they are infallibly ruined, Body and Soul. But whatever Rank we are of; without ſome Employment, Life muſt be tedious: and unleſs proper Employment be choſen to fill up the empty Spaces of it, groſs Imprudences and Sins will be crowding into them. Or if the Idle could avoid theſe, yet ſurely it is bad enough, that they cannot avoid making a deſpicable Figure in the World; that their Inattention, which will gradually produce an Incapacity of con-

conducting their own Affairs, muſt ſubject them to an abſolute Dependance upon others, who may impoſe upon them without Fear, to their great Prejudice, in more Ways than one. And beſides, how painful will the Reflection be to you, (if ever you have any Reflection) what happy Circumſtances you might have been in, what an honourable Appearance you might have made, had it not been for this contemptible Quality! But a ſtill more alarming Thought is, that thoſe Abilities and Opportunities of improving yourſelves, and being uſeful to your Fellow-Creatures, which God hath beſtowed on you, he will hereafter call you to anſwer for: and he hath warned you beforehand, that *the unprofitable and ſlothful Servant, who hath hid his Talent in the Earth, ſhall be caſt into outer Darkneſs*[d].

All People therefore, and the Young eſpecially, ſhould keep themſelves, not only employed, but employed to good Purpoſe. Both their Friends and they ſhould be very careful, not to direct their Aim to a wrong Point: for there are unhappy Miſtakes of this Kind. Such Things are frequently made the Study and Buſineſs of Life, as thoſe who employ themſelves in

[d] Matth. xxv. 25, 26, 30.

them

them had much better know nothing of; at leaſt can be little the better for knowing ever ſo well. But they take up a groundleſs Fancy of their own, or follow a weak Judgment or ſilly Example of another; ſet their whole Hearts on gaining a Reputation in ſome errant Trifle; and ſo, with great Pains, become very accompliſhed, and good for nothing. Not that ſlighter Accompliſhments, if they be real and ſuitable to our Station, are to be overlooked: or Beginners in Life to be ſeverely blamed, if they do place a little higher Value on ſuch Matters than they deſerve. But much Care ſhould be taken by thoſe about them, and ſtill more by themſelves, (for who is ſo nearly intereſted?) that Occupations of mere Amuſement do not fill up too much of their Thoughts or Time. Perhaps they are very innocent, perhaps they are very elegant: and therefore even the well-diſpoſed, amongſt others, indulge their Inclinations for them without Scruple. But ſtill there is an eſſential Difference between Things of Entertainment only, and Things of Uſe: and young People ſhould be formed, as ſoon as poſſible, to attend to this Difference; and ſhould always remember, that the Subjects for their Minds to dwell upon, the

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Employments for their Days to be ſpent in, are partly the particular ones, that belong to the ſeveral Situations, in which they are now, or probably will be placed; partly the general ones, of improving their Underſtandings in proper Knowledge, but above all their Hearts in the Love of God and their Duty: and to throw away Life upon other Purſuits to the Prejudice of theſe, is not only an Imprudence, productive of great Inconveniencies in this World; but a Sin, juſtly liable to Puniſhment in another.

12. And laſtly, one Inſtance more of Sobriety of Mind, which ought to be ſacredly regarded by the Young, is preſerving and expreſſing a due Eſteem and Reverence of ſuch as are farther advanced in Years. It is true, the natural Temper of the two Extremes of Life is very different: but Providence hath kindly mixed them together in Society, for mutual Benefit. Undoubtedly the Aged are ſubject to Imperfections and Faults: yet probably you often accuſe them unjuſtly: or if not, have not you Imperfections and Faults too, upon the whole more juſtly diſagreeable to them, than theirs are to you? Still theſe ought not to hinder you from being loved:

nor

nor ſhould thoſe hinder them from being reſpected. They ſhould interpret candidly the Sallies of your Inconſiderateneſs: and you in return, ſhould paſs over the little Failures in Point of Temper, which Infirmities may render very excuſable in them; and bear with the Reſtraints of poſſibly too great Caution, Parſimony and Regularity: though in general their long Experience muſt have made them better Judges of theſe Points, than you are as yet. But indeed it will for the moſt Part be in your own Power, to take off theſe Reſtraints from yourſelves in a great Meaſure, if not entirely. Check but that Levity, which raiſes in them Suſpicions of you; behave ſo, that you may ſafely be truſted; and endeavour to be agreeable to them, as they do continually to be uſeful to you: and all will be well. You Sprightlineſs and gay Humour was unqueſtionably deſigned in ſome Degree to comfort and enliven their declining Age. Be not unwilling therefore to ſpend ſome Share of it that Way: but beſtow a little of your Chearfulneſs upon them, in the Seaſon when you have Plenty of it, and you will give them a great deal of Pleaſure, when they want it very much. It is a truly good-natured Part to do ſo. It is a

proper

proper Gratitude for the many Kindneſſes and Advantages, which all young People have received from their Friends of riper Years. And they may make you large Amends for it, often in your worldly Intereſts, but almoſt conſtantly in ſuch Information and Direction, as will do you more Service, than all your Agreeableneſs can afford them Delight. Probably it is not long, that they may continue with you. Study to profit as much as you can by them, before you are left to yourſelves: and give them ſuch a Proſpect of your doing well, that they may quit the World with Comfort. In every common Art and Buſineſs, you ſhew great Regard to experienced Inſtructors: and can they fail to be of proportionable Uſe in the Science of conducting Life, the moſt important and moſt difficult of all others? Beſides, the Reſpect, which you are now perhaps unwilling to pay, you will in Time be very uneaſy, if you do not receive. Therefore preſerve a Rule of Behaviour, that you will one Day find your own Account in; and ſuffer it not, by your Fault, to be loſt out of the World in the mean while.

I have now gone through my Deſign. If in the Proſecution of it, I have urged Motives of a tem-

temporal, as well as a ſpiritual Nature, ſo hath the Scripture in a Multitude of Places. And if, together with greater Duties, I have recommended ſome of leſſer Moment; and, amongſt other Faults, cautioned againſt ſeveral, which may commonly be thought not to amount to Sins: yet whoever hath a juſt Concern for thoſe, who are ſetting out upon the Journey of Life, will think they need every uſeful Admonition for the Way. And it is highly requiſite, that all Perſons, eſpecially all young Perſons, ſhould cheriſh, even in ſmaller Inſtances, that Soberneſs and Rightneſs of Mind, which elſe will ſoon be neglected in more important Matters: following conſcientiouſly that Injunction of the Apoſtle, with which I conclude. *Finally, Brethren, whatſoever Things are true, whatſoever Things are honourable, whatſoever Things are lovely, whatſoever Things are of good Report:—Theſe Things do: and the God of Peace ſhall be with you*[e].

[e] Phil. iv. 8, 9.

SERMON

# SERMON V.

PROV. xvi. 31.

*The hoary Head is a Crown of Glory, if it be found in the Way of Righteouſneſs.*

LONG Life is what all Men naturally deſire: and yet to moſt no Part of Life ſeems to have much Happineſs in it; and that Part leaſt of all, to which living long brings them. In their younger and middle Years, between Buſineſs and Pleaſure, they amuſe themſelves with tolerable Succeſs. But old Age diſqualifies them by Degrees from reliſhing either: and at the ſame Time, that it takes away their Supports, adds to their Burthen too; by many Infirmities of Body and Mind, which often make them diſagreeable or contemptible to others, and uneaſy to themſelves. Beſides, in the former Stages of their Journey, Expectation of ſomewhat better to follow,

bears Men up; but in the concluding one, this World hath no new Hopes to preſent, and many new Fears ariſe from the approaching Neighbourhood of another: both becauſe dying gives Terror, when living gives little elſe but Pain; and becauſe the Conſequences of dying muſt of Neceſſity be viewed with moſt Concern, when we have leaſt Room left to ſecure their being ſuch as we could wiſh.

And yet, ſince, if God be good, Life muſt be a Bleſſing; long Life, it is reaſonable to conclude, muſt, in its own Nature, be proportionably a greater Bleſſing. For we cannot think he would plant in us the Deſire of what could only make us miſerable: or when he hath ordered every Thing elſe with ſuch gracious Foreſight, would leave any Portion of Man's Being, eſpecially that which is the Maturity of it here, deſtitute of proper Enjoyments. Old Age then, how much ſoever Men complain of it, ſurely may be both honourable and happy: nay indeed we have plain Proofs, that in fact it ſometimes is ſo, as well as too often otherwiſe.

It is therefore a very uſeful Inquiry, ſince the Thing is poſſible, how we ſhall ſet about it; what Way we ſhall take to render that Part

of

of our Lives reputable and comfortable, which we are ſome of us in, moſt of us hoping for, and all of us travelling towards. Now to this Queſtion the Text gives a full Anſwer, *The hoary Head is a Crown of Glory, if it be found in the Way of Righteouſneſs.* Where undoubtedly ſuch Glory is meant as comes attended with Satisfaction and Delight. It is very true, much of our Happineſs here ariſes from Things not in our Power; a good Conſtitution of Body, a compoſed and chearful Turn of Mind, an advantageous Situation in the World at firſt, and favourable Occurrences afterwards. But ſtill the far greateſt Part depends on our own Prudence. And ſince Virtue and Piety comprehend the chief Parts of Prudence, and without them there can be no Prudence to any Purpoſe; the wiſe Man hath named the principal Thing, *Righteouſneſs*, as if it were the only one, that *crowns the hoary Head with Glory.* To illuſtrate and confirm his Judgment in this Point, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

I. What Aſſiſtances Virtue and Piety contribute towards making old Age honourable and happy.

II. That they muſt be effectual.

I. Now they contribute to this End by two Means: laying the proper Foundations for it in the former Part of Life, and leading to the proper Behaviour for it in the latter.

1. Laying proper Foundations in the former Part.

Neglect of right Conduct in our early Years is the main Reason, that our advanced ones are despicable and miserable. The Irregularities of Youth make old Age infirm and painful, when otherwise we might have been vigorous and gay, and enjoyed an Autumn, not at all upon the whole inferior to the Spring. The idle Expences of Youth load our declining Days with Perplexities and Distresses, when a little timely Care might have secured us ever after from Anxiety, and furnished us with Plenty of all Things against the Time when we need it most. Neglect of Application to proper Knowledge in the Beginning of our Course leaves us destitute, through all the Conclusion of it, both of the Entertainment and the Respect, which we then peculiarly want, and Knowledge is peculiarly fitted to give. For as the Son of *Sirach* observes, *If thou hast gathered nothing in thy Youth, how*

*canst*

*canſt thou find any Thing in thy Age*[a]*?* Again: early Indulgence of ill Temper muſt fix a Habit, that will fill our Life, eſpecially the Cloſe of it, with perpetual Vexation and Diſquiet: Default of cultivating in Time valuable Friendſhips, excludes us from the Benefit of them, when they would be more valuable than ever: Default of educating well thoſe who belong to us, makes them grow up to be Curſes, inſtead of Bleſſings, to our grey Hairs. But, above all, forgetting *our Creator in the Days of our Youth*[b], deprives us of thoſe joyful Hopes that revive and warm the decaying Frame, and ſinks us down under the heavieſt and juſteſt Apprehenſions and Terrors. All theſe Evils Virtue and Religion would prevent: perhaps intirely; at leaſt in a great Meaſure. And it is a dreadful Thing, that Men will not be brought to conſider this ſoon enough. They will not only ſlight the Motives of another Life, though it be very near us all, but will ſcarce look a ſingle Step before them in this. For ſurely did they ſee what they are doing, and believe in earneſt, that they are employing their Youth to make their riper Age unhappy, they would change

[a] Eccluſ xxv. 3. [b] Eccleſ. xii. 1.

their Conduct. But all they think of is, to croud into a ſmall Space as much Self-indulgence as they poſſibly can; till they almoſt deſtroy the Reliſh of that by Exceſs in it; and abſolutely all Regard to any Thing better. And then, after the gay Madneſs of a few Years, what remains of Life grows inſipid and wearisome; and the Reliefs they commonly fly to only increaſe their Shame and Wretchedneſs. But right Behaviour will ſecure us that Regard, even in the firſt Part of our Days, which we muſt not in any Part expect without it. *For honourable Age is not that which ſtandeth in Length of Time, nor that is meaſured by Number of Years. But Wiſdom is the grey Hair unto Men, and an unſpotted Life is old Age*[c].

Theſe Conſiderations, though much more uſeful, when they are thought of ſoon, yet are never too late to be highly beneficial. Indeed our Condition can at no Time be either ſo bad or ſo good, but we may ſtill make it worſe or better, as we pleaſe. They who have lived ever ſo ill, may by undoing, as far as they can, what they have done amiſs, prevent the worſt Conſequences of it; and obtain, in a

[c] Wiſd. iv. 8, 9.

ſmall

ſmall Time, no ſmall Degree of Favour from God, Honour from Men, and Comfort in themſelves: while, on the other Hand, they who began ever ſo well, may, by deviating from their Duty in the finiſhing Period, overturn all. To prevent this, it is needful we ſhould inquire into the

2d Method, that Religion and Virtue take to crown old Age with Glory: which is, directing to proper Behaviour when that Age comes. And ſuch Behaviour conſiſts again in two Things: avoiding the Faults, to which we are then peculiarly ſubject; and practiſing the Duties, to which we are peculiarly bound.

1. Avoiding the Faults, to which we are then peculiarly ſubject. And here,

The moſt common Faults which Perſons in Years are charged with, often unjuſtly and inconſiderately, but ſometimes alſo with too much Reaſon, are, Artfulneſs and Inſenſibility, Selfiſhneſs and Avarice. As they become, by Length of Time, more knowing and more practiſed in the Ways of Men, they contract a Diſinclination to frank and open Dealing, and are apt to carry Prudence ſo far, that it degenerates into Craft. Their Tempers alſo growing leſs tender, and gradually callous, by ſeeing and

going through the various Evils of Life, they have not always a ſufficient Senſibility of Heart remaining, to enſure to others kind and compaſſionate Uſage from them. And theſe are Sins of great Infamy and great Guilt: which Religion and Virtue ſtrictly prohibit; and both enjoin and encourage the moſt honourable Fairneſs and friendlieſt Humanity, as ordinarily conducive to our Intereſt as well as Credit in this World, and certainly the Way to endleſs Felicity in the next.

With the Errors, juſt mentioned, is uſually connected, one of very bad Repute, yet very frequent in old Age, a mean and penurious Behaviour. They who are ſparing in their younger Days ſeldom fail to be much more thrifty in their Decline: and ſometimes the profuſe, when they leave off that Folly, endeavour to make Amends for it by running into the oppoſite. Yet, one ſhould think, the aged, as of all Perſons they are in the leaſt Danger of wanting, ſhould be the leaſt fond of hoarding, and the fartheſt from ſtrong Attachments to the World, as they are the neareſt to having done with it. Perhaps indeed longer Experience of the Viciſſitudes of Things gives them livelier Apprehenſions of what may ſtill happen.

happen. But as no Proviſion can abſolutely ſecure them, going beyond the Bounds of reaſonable Caution is taking much Pains to little Purpoſe. Laying up for Poſterity is another Excuſe, and very often a falſe one. For where they have no one at all, that either Nature or Reaſon binds them to lay up for, they will be as anxiouſly buſy and frugal, as if they had ever ſo many: a Caſe which *Solomon* hath deſcribed admirably well. *There is one alone, and there is not a ſecond: yea he hath neither Child nor Brother: yet there is no End to all his Labour, neither is his Eye ſatisfied with Riches; neither ſaith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my Soul of Good? This alſo is Vanity; yea, it is a ſore Travel* [d]. Probably indeed ſomewhat of the induſtrious and ſaving Turn was allotted by the Wiſdom of Providence to old Perſons in general, becauſe moſt of them have young ones depending on them, that need it. And if they have, to neglect them for the Sake of indulging their own Pleaſure or Indolence, is unnatural Wickedneſs. But ſtill, ſparing and accumulating without Reaſon or Uſe, is both Sin and Folly. The chief Inducements to it ſeem to be, that, former Gratifications

[d] Eccl. iv. 8.

loſing

loſing their Agreeableneſs, Men are driven to take up with this: which alſo they look on as the moſt certain Means of making thoſe about them, for their own Intereſt, behave well to them. But ſurely they had much better, with reſpect to themſelves, have pitched at the firſt on ſuch proper Things for the Objects of their Eſteem and Deſire, as they could not fail of delighting in to the laſt; and with reſpect to others, it is far wiſer to aim at real Regard from them, by virtuous Inſtruction given them, and prudent Kindneſs exerciſed continually towards them, than to be content with this wretched Method of procuring by Hoards of Wealth a mere Pretence of Regard from them. For they who on ſuch Grounds pay Court to the aged outwardly, can ſcarce avoid deſpiſing and hating them inwardly; and ſometimes long for their Deaths, as Nothing is to be expected from them during their Lives. Inſtead therefore of thus tormenting themſelves and thoſe about them, old Men ſhould throw aſide needleſs Cares, and venture to partake of fitting Comforts: enjoy Good chearfully themſelves, and do Good chearfully to others. For why ſhould we not chuſe to be thanked and bleſt for thoſe Acts of Beneficence now, which, if we omit till we die,

it will be ſaid we only beſtowed what we could not keep: whereas if we give when we might have withheld, this is a voluntary Sacrifice, and an Evidence to our own Hearts, as well as to the World, that we act from a right Principle.

Some indeed cannot part with much beforehand: and to part with all, is ſeldom or never diſcreet. The Advice of the *Preacher* hath in general a very juſt Foundation: *Give not thy Son, thy Brother or Friend, Power over thee while thou liveſt, and give not thy Goods to another: leſt it repent thee, and thou entreat for the ſame again.—For better is it, that thy Children ſhould ſeek to thee, than that thou ſhouldſt ſtand to their Courteſy. In all thy Works keep to thyſelf the Preeminence: —at the Time when thou ſhalt end thy Days, diſtribute thine Inheritance*[e]. But then on the other Hand, to grudge thoſe who belong to us the Expence of a proper Education, or what is requiſite for diſpoſing of them decently in the World; to deny them the Means of appearing ſuitably to their Rank, and keep them in Straits, while we have Superfluities ourſelves, is very cruel, and equally pernicious. In all Likelihood, either they will grow niggardly

[e] Eccluſ xxxiii. 19, 23.

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in Imitation of us, or extravagant from Hatred to us; or their Spirits will be broken, or their Opportunities of advancing themſelves loſt: or if they ſhould do well, in Spight of our ill Behaviour to them, what Thanks can we poſſibly deſerve from them, though we do leave them at laſt, what they would have been much more obliged to us for a moderate Share of, prudently beſtowed ſome Years before? And this holds, not only concerning our Relations, but all our other Dependants, and indeed the poor alſo: that when they want it, and we can afford it, the ſooner we are liberal to them, the better. And therefore the ſame Perſon, who was the Author of the foregoing Rule, delivers alſo the following: *Do Good unto thy Friend before thou die; and according to thy Ability ſtretch out thy Hand, and give to him*[f].

Thus then Religion and Virtue direct the aged to avoid the Faults of that Warineſs of Temper, to which they are peculiarly inclined. And another Fault, of which they are in no little Danger, but cautioned againſt it by the ſame Means, is that of giving improperly and unequitably what they do give, either in their Lives or at their Deaths. Now and then

[f] Eccluſ xiv. 13.

perhaps

perhaps the Vanity of doing generous and charitable Actions makes them too negligent of their Families. But much oftener the Vanity of raiſing a Family makes them negligent of the needy and the worthy, their Servants, their Intimates, their Relations, nay, it may be, their very Children, excepting one; upon whom they heap all they can, and leave every one elſe diſappointed of what they had Reaſon to expect, and perhaps in Diſtreſs for Want of it. Sometimes a different Sort of Evil happens: the aged are impoſed on by artful People, that get about them, and ingratiate themſelves by Flattery and Compliance and Officiouſneſs, till they obtain Intereſt enough to carry every Point they will, in their own Favour, or for the Advantage of thoſe that employ them; and ſupplant others, that, in Nearneſs, or in true Deſert, either ſtand before them, or at leaſt on a Level with them. Nor are the aged, with all their Caution, by any Means ſo much on their Guard againſt theſe Wretches as they ought. At other Times the Fault is more intirely their own. They ſuffer little Piques and Prejudices to influence them, contrary to the juſteſt Motives, and their own former kind Intentions. Now

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this is very hard and wrong; that a groundleſs Diſlike, or a trifling Offence, or even every great Offence, ſhould change a reaſonable Diſpoſition of Things: above all, when perhaps Expectations have been given, and the World made acquainted with them, and Steps in Life taken in Conſequence of them. Whatever Right they may plead to do as they will with their own, they are not at Liberty to act thus; but ought to look on the proper Diſpoſal of their Fortunes as a Matter of Conſcience; and take into ſerious Conſideration every Circumſtance that ſhould naturally have Weight in the Caſe. Nearneſs of Relation is a Ground of Preference, which ſhould never be diſregarded without the ſtrongeſt Motives to the contrary: Motives, which not only we ourſelves think ſufficient, but other good and wiſe Perſons, unintereſted in the Caſe, allow to be ſuch. Farther Claims, never to be overlooked when we have Ability for taking Notice of them, are, Kindneſſes formerly received, Promiſes given, Length and Faithfulneſs of Service or Attendance, Merit, Want. And all theſe Demands the Uncertainty of Life admoniſhes every one to provide for paying as ſoon as he can; but the certain Approach of Death requires

quires the old not to poſtpone it a ſingle Day. And performing this Duty, as they ought, is one valuable Inſtance of Righteouſneſs, which will give them Comfort in their own Breaſts, procure them Regard (ſo far as it is known) whilſt they live, and do them laſting Honour when they die.

Another Danger, to which the aged are yet more peculiarly expoſed, is Ill-temper. Decay of Spirits, and Loſs of Strength, joined often with beginning Diſorders, which they feel in themſelves, before others perceive it, are very apt to make them fretful and impatient: a Thing ſo natural, that the young and healthy ſhould make large Allowances for what they may want Allowance for themſelves, ſooner than they imagine. But the old and infirm ſhould conſider, that the ſeveral Ages of Life have their ſeveral Trials aſſigned them; and this is one of theirs: which Virtue and Religion as much require they ſhould not be overcome by, as that the young ſhould not give Way to any of the Temptations which beſet them. Being out of Humour without knowing why, is childiſh Weakneſs. Being ſo, becauſe we perceive ourſelves declining, is quarrelling with the Conſtitution of Things,

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and with Providence itſelf. And though our Decline be attended with Weariſomeneſs and even Pain, yet Peeviſhneſs under theſe will only add to them. Beſides, it is very hard, that thoſe about us muſt be made to ſuffer more than is neceſſary, becauſe we are uneaſy; and it is great odds, but they will ſhew they think it hard by ſuch Behaviour as will augment our Uneaſineſs: whereas bearing with Mildneſs and Patience, for the ſhort Time we have left to bear, what God pleaſes to lay upon us, is expreſſing a Reſignation very acceptable to him, and a Sweetneſs of Diſpoſition very delightful to all that ſee it. They who act thus will ſeldom fail to be attended on with Pleaſure; to have, as they well deſerve, every Expreſſion of Regard and Tenderneſs ſhewn them, and every Method taken, which Love and Pity can invent, to alleviate their Sufferings.

It is therefore both the Duty and the Wiſdom of the aged ſtudiouſly to preſerve a compoſed and even Mind; to look upon Things in the moſt pleaſing View they can; to turn their Thoughts and Diſcourſe to make others chearful when they can; at leaſt to appear willing and inclined to let others make them

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ſo; and when they cannot riſe to any Height of good Humour, to keep however from falling into bad.

But inſtead of acting thus, too often they increaſe the Moroſeneſs, which their own Infirmities breed in them, by a much leſs excuſable Fault, a malevolent Envy at the Health and Strength and Gaiety of others. Now this is highly blameable; inſtead of riſing from the Feaſt contented and thankful Gueſts, to grudge thoſe who come after them what they have already had their Share of, and may ſtill have a further and very entertaining one, if they pleaſe; by continuing candid Spectators of thoſe Scenes, in which their Time to act is paſt. But the Pleaſure, which perhaps they might otherwiſe take in ſuch a View, is frequently palled by a Suſpicion, that their Company is wanted no longer; that all about them are grown weary of them, wiſh them dead and out of the Way. Now indeed where at any Time this is true, that young Perſons murmur at the Goodneſs of God in granting their Parents and Friends that Length of Days, which they will certainly in their Turns, (whatever they think now) deſire for themſelves; it is both ſo wicked, and uſually ſo

ungrateful and imprudent too, that no Wonder if it raiſes great Concern in thoſe to whom it relates: which however they will do much better to conceal and moderate, than expreſs and indulge. But then to imagine ſuch a Thing, without evident Cauſe, is giving ourſelves as much needleſs Uneaſineſs, and doing the Perſon ſuſpected as grievous Injuſtice, as well can be. Human Creatures are but ſeldom ſo unnatural: and excepting a few, who are very profligate, they hardly ever think the Lives of others too long, unleſs they find their own made unhappy by them, without deſerving it. Therefore let us but be ſure to take Care of our Behaviour, and be our Stay what it will, we ſhall ſeldom if ever have Ground to doubt our Welcome. Jealouſy in all Caſes, but eſpecially when attended with its moſt common Attendant, Ill-temper, is the likelieſt Way in the World to make that true, which it apprehends to be ſo. Thoſe therefore, who would prevent their Deaths being longed for, muſt make their Lives, if poſſible, agreeable and uſeful. They muſt be doing Things for the Benefit and Satisfaction of the Generation that is riſing under them; and give them what Proſpect they are able of being well paid for

waiting a while. They muſt ſhew themſelves eaſy to be pleaſed, and receive kindly the Regards paid them, and the Services done them; neither reſenting it, nor wondering at it, if there be ſome Failures in both; as doubtleſs there were formerly in their own Behaviour at the ſame Age. They muſt endeavour to make the Time that young People ſpend with them not only as improving, but as eaſy as they well can; and after all, not require too much of it; but both allow, and indeed contrive for them, ſuch proper Seaſons of innocent Relaxation and Amuſement elſewhere, as it muſt be known they cannot but deſire. They who in their early Days were treated with this Humanity themſelves, are inexcuſable unleſs they afterwards treat others with the ſame: and ſuch as were not, ſhould remember, not only how ſtrictly they were bred up, but how hardly they bore it, and how unreaſonable they thought it.

At preſent indeed too great Indulgence is much the commoner Fault, and will certainly appear, (may I not ſay, hath abundantly appeared already?) to be a moſt fatal Error; worſe by far than any moderate Degree of over-great Rigour. But the Extremity of it

may be full as bad as total Negligence. The one makes thoſe that are guilty of it deſpiſed; the other makes them hated; and which bids faireſt to ruin thoſe that are educated under its Influence would be hard to ſay. Sometimes the ſame Perſons have both theſe Faults at once. Their Favourites can do nothing wrong; thoſe out of Favour nothing right. And ſuch Partiality is the readieſt Way to ſpoil both. To the former it is a dangerous Privilege: to the latter, a Provocation that may drive them to Deſpair: and the Importance of each Error demands our utmoſt Care to avoid it, by preſerving an impartial and conſiderate Conduct. On the one Hand, young People ought abſolutely to be reſtrained from criminal Pleaſures; and obliged to ſuch Application and Employment of themſelves, as their Duty and Condition require. Nay, whatever hath but a Tendency to make them wicked or uſeleſs, muſt, in Proportion to that Tendency, be diſcouraged and prohibited. For elderly Perſons are far from having the Senſe they ought, either of their paſt Sins or their preſent Obligations; if becauſe they had formerly Vices themſelves they indulge thoſe who belong to them in the ſame Vices now. But then, on

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the other Side, it is a grievous Fault too, if the Conſciouſneſs of their own youthful Irregularities induce them, when they are old, to ſuſpect and condemn others without Reaſon. For what can be more unrighteous than to puniſh the Innocent, or think no one is innocent, merely becauſe we know ourſelves to have been guilty? Nor is another Concluſion, though frequently drawn, by any Means a juſt one, that in our younger Days we were under ſuch and ſuch Reſtraints; perhaps too, (if we have not forgot) were tolerably well contented with them; and therefore no one that belongs to us ſhall ever have any greater Liberty. But we ſhould remember, that different Tempers require different Treatment: and even the Cuſtoms of different Ages muſt have Allowances made to them, and in ſome Meaſure be complied with. It is very natural for the aged to think highly of the Practices of their own Times, and be diſpleaſed with the Novelties which another Generation introduces. Nor can it be denied but in ſeveral Reſpects there is at preſent ſufficient Foundation for ſuch Diſlike. But this however muſt not be carried too far. In Matters that are indifferent it is of no Importance what Uſages

prevail: or if a leſs becoming, or leſs convenient one, doth take Place; provided that be all, the Harm is not great. The World hath always had its Follies of this Sort as well as others: only, when they are out of Date, they are ſoon forgotten. And though we ſhould carefully diſpoſe young People, to comply with the Dictates of good Senſe, even in the leaſt Things, becauſe that leads them to do ſo in greater; yet their ſmaller Deviations from it muſt be born with: and to inveigh againſt theſe as heinous Crimes, is confounding the Diſtinctions of Things; and, by overſtraining the Point in Trifles, we loſe the Regard, that might elſe be paid us in Articles of Importance.

And indeed more conſiderable Inſtances of Miſbehaviour in Youth, ought to be animadverted on by the Elder with due Moderation. For the Heart may not be near ſo wrong, as the outward Action: and prudent Gentleneſs will often reclaim thoſe, whom harſh Treatment will exaſperate beyond Recovery: eſpecially if they can perſuade themſelves, as they eaſily do, that any Part of it is unjuſt. Therefore it ſhould be a conſtant Rule, to hear them patiently in their own Defence; admit their Excuſes, as far as they are at all well grounded;

ed; and place their Failings before them in that Point of View, which is likelieſt to convince their Judgment, and gain their Eſteem: for till that is done, nothing is done effectually. To this End they ſhould always be permitted the Freedom of a decent Reply: and if they ſhould ſometimes abuſe that Freedom a little, taking a mild Notice of it will generally be the beſt Way to ſhame them, or at leaſt ſhould be tried firſt.

There is likewiſe, in Matters which are at all diſputable, another Motive for this Conduct. Undoubtedly, in general, the aged have had by far the greateſt Opportunities for ſeeing and weighing Things; and are the fitteſt Judges of their Nature and Conſequences. The Preſumption is intirely on the Side of their Opinion: and this ought to be conſidered much more than it is. But then they have not always uſed their Opportunities to the beſt Advantage. They may have ſtood ſtill a great while without Improvement; and conſequently be in ſome Reſpects behind thoſe, whom in Years they precede. It is not impoſſible, but the Notions, by which they judge now, may have been taken up altogether accidentally at firſt, when they were as raw and thoughtleſs,

as thoſe whom they direct and reprove. Or, however, though in plain Matters, as known Duties and Sins, and allowed Inſtances of common Prudence and groſs Folly, we cannot be miſtaken; yet in others, the wiſeſt may ſometimes judge wrong, and the moſt unexperienced hit upon the Truth. Mildneſs of Temper and Speech therefore is very uſeful, on this Account amongſt others, that if we ſhould happen to miſtake, we may confeſs it without Reluctance or Loſs of Credit; (for it will be in vain to think of concealing it;) and may deſerve more Reſpect, inſtead of leſs, from thoſe whom we treat with ſo much Fairneſs and Condeſcenſion. When both Sides are ingenuous enough to act thus; when a ſuperior in Years can frankly yield to the better Argument of a younger than himſelf, and the younger in Return behave with Modeſty, and a Sort of decent Confuſion, at the Advantage he hath happened to gain; it is hard to ſay, which Character is the moſt amiable; and it is great Pity that both are ſo rare.

I muſt not proceed further at preſent: and poſſibly ſome may think, I have dwelt too much already on Particulars, not important enough to be looked on as religious Obligations:

tions: and that this Sort of preaching is not preaching Chriſtianity. But I beg them to conſider, that the Deſign of the Goſpel is to make us good in ſmall Matters, as well as great; happy in our preſent State as well as our future; that, for want of obſerving ſuch Rules, as I have now given, much Wickedneſs and much Miſery obtain in the World; and when they are neglected, as they are too often, by Perſons *profeſſing Godlineſs* [g], their Profeſſion is diſhonoured, and their Salvation endangered. The common Duties therefore of common Life, from the higheſt to the loweſt, muſt be diſtinctly ſet forth, and earneſtly inculcated. But then it muſt be conſtantly underſtood at the ſame Time, that we have not Strength to perform any Duties, but through the Grace of Chriſt: nor will our Performances be accepted and rewarded, but through the Merits of Chriſt. Always remember therefore, what ſurely you need not always be told, that *as the Branch cannot bear Fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the Vine, no more can we, except we abide in Him: He is the Vine, we are the Branches: he that abideth in Chriſt, and Chriſt in him, the ſame bringeth forth much Fruit: for without Him we can do nothing* [h].

[g] 1 Tim. ii. 10. [h] John xv. 4, 5.

SERMON

# SERMON VI.

PROV. xvi. 31.

*The hoary Head is a Crown of Glory, if it be found in the Way of Righteouſneſs.*

THE Uneaſineſſes of Life in every Period of it are many, and often heavy: but old Age abounds with Sufferings beyond the reſt. Some of theſe proceed unavoidably from our Make, and the Situation in which we are placed; but ſo much a larger Share from our own ill Conduct, that the wiſeſt of Men hath not feared to pronounce in the Text, that an uniform Courſe of Religion and Virtue would crown even that Part of our Days with Honour and Happineſs, in which we are too commonly deſpiſed by others, and wretched within ourſelves.

To illuſtrate and confirm a Truth ſo inſtructive and important, I have propoſed to ſhew from theſe Words,

I. What

I. What Aſſiſtances Religion and Virtue contribute to this moſt deſirable End.

II. That they muſt be effectual.

Now the firſt Way, as you have already ſeen, in which Religion and Virtue contribute to render old Age honourable and happy, is by directing us, in the former Part of Life, to make the neceſſary Proviſions for its being ſo: not to ruin our Healths beforehand by Irregularities, nor our Fortunes by Extravagance; not to make our grey Hairs contemptible for want of timely Application to uſeful Knowledge and Buſineſs, nor hateful by a preceding Life of Injuſtice or Ill-nature; nor fill our Souls with Terrors, when our latter End approaches, by forgetting *our Creator in our Youth*. For theſe are Burthens, with which we need not, unleſs we will, load our declining Years.

I then ſhewed you, that after this previous Care, Virtue and Religion direct us, how to behave aright, when the Time comes; to avoid the Temptations, and practiſe the Duties, which it brings along with it.

I. To avoid the Temptations.

Amongſt theſe, one capital Danger is that of a ſelfiſh Diſpoſition: which too frequently manifeſts its peculiar bad Influence on the

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aged, in Artifice and Fraud, Hard-heartedneſs and Inſenſibility; unſeaſonable and immoderate worldly Purſuits; in their denying themſelves what is fit; or grudging to beſtow on others, what Nearneſs of Blood, or Promiſes made, or Expectations raiſed, or Gratitude, or Friendſhip, or Generoſity, or Charity, require. And beſides all this, they are very liable to give improperly and unequitably what they do give. Another Fault, that greatly diminiſhes both the Honour and the Comfort of the Old, is ill Temper: ſometimes ariſing from their own Infirmities, and Envy at the Health and Gaiety of others; ſometimes from thinking, that they are not reſpected and eſteemed enough, and indulging Suſpicions that their Death is wiſhed for; ſometimes again, from ſeeing younger People, eſpecially thoſe under their Care, conduct themſelves in a Manner they diſapprove.

Under each of theſe Particulars, I laid before you the Maxims and Methods, which Virtue and Religion preſcribe, for the avoiding of Diſhonour and Unhappineſs in the concluding Scenes of Life. I now proceed to an Error of a different Nature; into which they, who eſcape the former, frequently fall, though equally contrary to the Rule of Duty; I mean,

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Fondneſs for unallowable Gratifications and Amuſements.

Vicious Pleaſures in old Age are doubly immoral. Offences againſt Modeſty and Chaſtity at that Time of Life are unnatural, void of all Excuſe, and deliver over thoſe who commit them to a moſt peculiar Sort of Contempt. Offences againſt Sobriety and Temperance, far from cheering and enlivening, in any proper Manner, oppreſs and precipitate declining Age; and turn the Wiſdom, which ſhould procure Reverence to the hoary Head, into groſs and often public Childiſhneſs, if not worſe. Continuing therefore to theſe Years in Follies, which we ought never to have begun, is exceeding bad: and nothing but beginning them at theſe Years, of which there are ſometimes Examples, can be worſe.

But ſuppoſe old Perſons only to dote upon innocent Levities, they muſt expect to be ridiculed for it by the livelier Part of the World, and lamented by the more ſerious. That no prevailing Taſte for any Thing more valuable, ſhould be even yet acquired, is very deplorable: and throwing away, in this idle Manner, the ſmall Remainder of their Days, after all the foregoing Part, will render their Caſe completely

pletely wretched. A Life well ſpent hitherto, would have made better Ways of employing their Time agreeable now: and one ill ſpent will make them abſolutely neceſſary. Not that the aged are to be totally debarred from fitting Relaxations. Very often, by Reaſon of Infirmities of Body or Mind, ſome Indulgences of that Sort become highly requiſite for them. And indeed, unleſs there be very particular Occaſion requiring it, old Age is not the Seaſon for Men to increaſe their Application to any Thing that fatigues them; but to moderate it gradually, and give themſelves Eaſe in Proportion as they need it. Beſides, it is a good-natured Part, ſometimes to join a little in the Diverſions of the young; which alſo we may be able thus, much more effectually than by any other Way, to ſuperintend and bring under prudent Regulations. But to make this, or any Thing elſe, a Pretence for gratifying Inclinations, that we are aſhamed of owning; to fill up as many of our Hours, as we poſſibly can, with idle Entertainments; to purſue them eagerly; be laviſh of Expence upon them, and make them the Buſineſs of Life; to be continually ſeeking out for ſtill more Opportunities of running away from Thought, and of

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deſtroying Time, inſtead of improving it to the noble Purpoſes of our Being; is always contrary both to Religion, and to Reaſon itſelf; but more eſpecially inconſiſtent with that Serioufneſs and Dignity of Character, which the aged beyond all others are bound to ſupport. What may be pardonable, or even juſtifiable, in Youth, will often ſit very ill on them: and the ſame Things, done by the one and the other, are no longer the ſame. Every Station and every Age hath its diſtinct Propriety of Behaviour. And it is a principal Step, both towards gaining and deſerving Eſteem, to underſtand and maintain this Propriety. But the ſtricteſt Attention to it will juſtly be expected of that Age, which hath nothing to boaſt of, if it hath not Superiority of Judgment and Diſcretion. All Affectation therefore of Youthfulneſs, when Youth is over, whether in our Appearance, our Diſcourſe, or Occupations, will diſguſt thoſe that ſee it: and be on good Grounds thought, if not a Sin, yet a very blamable Weakneſs, and that of a wrong Mind. People are never juſtly liable either to Cenſure, or to Ridicule for being what they are and muſt be; but for labouring to ſeem what they are not, and perhaps cannot be.

And

And as their acting an ungraceful Part, will be obſerved, ſo they will not fail to have, either ſuch Intimations from others, or ſuch a Conſciouſneſs of it within themſelves, as will give them an Uneaſineſs from Time to Time, to which nothing, but growing wiſer, will put an End. Therefore on every Account it ought to ſuffice them, that they have been fond of Trifles and Vanities, as long as ever it was tolerable to be ſo: and they ſhould now put on another Character once for all, that will be more eaſily ſuſtained, and become them better; withdraw themſelves like the venerable *Barzillai*, (whoſe Reſolution was doubtleſs recorded as a Pattern [a]) from the Delights, and the Pretenſions that are become unſuitable to their Years; and leave them willingly to the ſucceeding Generation.

By this Time, it may be hoped, I have gone through the chief Temptations, againſt which the Aged ought peculiarly to guard themſelves. The next Inſtruction, given them by Religion and Virtue, is

2. To practiſe the Duties, to which they are peculiarly bound.

Indeed moſt, if not all, the Duties of Life belong to every Part of it: but ſome of them

[a] 2 Sam. xix. 35.

are more eſpecially the Buſineſs of one Part, ſome of another. And the firſt of this Sort, incumbent on Perſons advanced in Years is, ſerious Reflection on their paſt Conduct; accompanied with earneſt Endeavours to undo, as far as they can, whatever they have done amiſs, and rectify the Errors of their buſier and warmer Days. It is very true, no one of our Days ought to paſs over us, without carefully aſking ourſelves, what we are doing: and if we neglect it, till we are nigh the End of them, many important Things will be forgotten, and yet ſo many diſagreeable ones croud into our Memory, that we ſhall ſet about the Inquiry into our Condition with little Heart; and go through it, if at all, with great Pain. It is a fatal Miſtake, not to conſider how we act, till we have almoſt done acting. But however, when this Miſtake hath been committed, it is beyond Compariſon, better to own it and amend, than perſevere in it. And therefore ſuch above all others, as have Reaſon to know, that hitherto they have given themſelves but ſmall Leiſure for Recollection, ſhould now at leaſt, before the Time is quite paſt, retire a little from the World into the Secret of their Hearts, and coolly think over their own Hiſtory: not

to ſee, what further wrong Things they can add to thoſe, which they have done already; not to place their Conduct in falſe Lights before others, or palliate it to themſelves; but to judge impartially, as in the Preſence of God, after weighing the various Obligations they have been under, to him and their Fellow-Creatures, how far they have fulfilled, and how far they have tranſgreſſed, the one or the other. A Review of this Kind, uprightly and diligently made, may very poſſibly give many of our Actions an exceedingly different Appearance to us, from what they bore in the Heat and Hurry of our livelier and more thoughtleſs Years. Still, if the new Light, which we may thus receive, could be of no other Uſe, than barely to ſhew us, what in Reality we have been and are, ſome perhaps would imagine it no very deſirable Thing. But as it may enable us, even yet, to become what we ought to be; all muſt confeſs it to be important beyond Expreſſion. No Scheme of Life indeed can be more abſurd, than reſolving beforehand to ſpend it inconſiſtently; one Part in doing ill, the other in being ſorry for it. And ſeldom do they, who ſet out with this Reſolution, execute more than the firſt half. But

whenever it doth happen, that any ſuch, or any other Perſon, is convinced of his paſt Sins; though his Reformation muſt be uncommonly exemplary, to be of equal Value with Innocence; yet, if it be at all ſincere, it muſt be unſpeakably preferable to final Impenitence. For there is great Virtue ſhewn, in breaking off the Chains of inveterate Habits, confeſſing and quitting favourite Errors, and bearing patiently that Variety of Reflections which the Vicious and Thoughtleſs are extremely apt to throw upon all, who by ceaſing to act like them, appear to condemn them. Nor will this amiable kind of Goodneſs ever miſs of its Reward. God will graciouſly accept of ſuch Acknowledgments as we can make, though we can never make ſufficient; provided we truſt not haughtily in the fancied Merits of our imperfect Repentance, but humbly throw ourſelves on his promiſed Mercy in our bleſſed Redeemer. And wiſe and good Men, far from reproaching us with the Faults we have ſearched out and forſaken, will be induſtrious to give us Marks of their Eſteem: an abundant Compenſation for loſing the good Word, perhaps not the good Opinion, of our former Companions in Sin.

The more piouſly and virtuouſly Men have lived, the leſs Neceſſity they will have in their old Age, for ſo minute a Review of their Ways: but then they will receive the greateſt, the moſt ſeaſonable Comfort from it. And however good they have been; upon ſtrict Inquiry, they will be very likely to find a much larger Number of Blemiſhes and Spots, than they thought of, that have ſtuck to them in ſome Part or other of their Journey through this dirty World; which it may afford their Hearts inexpreſſible Eaſe, in their dying Hours, to have cleared their Conſciences and their Characters from, by judging themſelves, before they go to be judged of the Lord.

A Mind, thus humbled and purified, will naturally turn itſelf to the next Duty, which peculiarly belongs to the Aged, that of religious Exerciſes and Contemplations. Theſe Things, in the active Part of Life, are much leſs practiſed than the Obligations we are under, and the Direction and Conſolation we might receive from them, require. And falſe Excuſes of Want of Leiſure are pleaded, whilſt Leiſure enough can be found for Trifles without Number; and for too many Sins, which

conſume no ſmall Part of the Time of thoſe, who imagine, or pretend, they have none for Religion. Indeed the Pretences they make for neglecting the Worſhip of Him who made them are ſo wretchedly poor, that in any other Caſe, of the leaſt Seriouſneſs, they would be quite aſhamed to mention them. But this, it ſeems, is a Subject, which they ſcarce conceive it worth while to talk or think ſeriouſly upon. The Time will come, here or hereafter, when they will be of another Opinion: and the ſooner it comes, the happier for them. The Cares and Pleaſures of Life, when they are at the Heighth, are far from being any Reaſon to forget God: but the Decline of Life brings new Reaſons with it for remembering Him. That calmer Seaſon at leaſt hath many vacant Hours; and what can fill them ſo properly and beneficially as Acts of Devotion and pious Meditation, adapted to the State in which we then are? The Aged have had longer Experience of God's Mercies than others, to furniſh Matter for Thankſgivings: and it may be feared have been guilty of more Tranſgreſſions or Omiſſions, that will give them Cauſe for Confeſſion, Self-abaſement, Deprecation of Puniſh-

Puniſhment. Then beſides, they muſt ſurely, by this Time, have fully ſeen and felt the Vanity of the World in every Shape. Hitherto deceitful Hopes have amuſed them on, and kept them in Purſuit of one Thing or another, that hath never anſwered their Expectations; or if any did for a while, it is gone, and nothing new remains to promiſe themſelves. Now then, at fartheſt, the utter Deluſion of aiming at Happineſs, otherwiſe than by Religion and Virtue, is viſible to the weakeſt Eye: and nothing appears of real Value but the Conſciouſneſs of acting right, and the Proſpect of being rewarded for it.

Theſe then are the Thoughts which alone can ſupport and enliven old Age. And how uncomfortable ſoever a Stranger to ſuch Thoughts may imagine this Condition to be; yet in Truth it is a great Bleſſing to perceive the Neceſſity of making that our laſt Refuge, which would have been at all Times our wiſeſt Choice. Not that, in ſuch a Situation, Men are to weary themſelves with tedious and unprofitable Taſks of Piety, or ſour their Minds with a ſcrupulous Attention to ſerious Things, and no others; but only, in Proportion as they are able, to attend conſcientiouſly on every

Office of public Worſhip, with ſincere Endeavours of profiting by it; to excite and nouriſh good Diſpoſitions, by the Uſe of ſuch Books as are fitteſt for that End, eſpecially the holy Scriptures; to lift up their Souls, from Time to Time, to the greateſt and beſt of Beings, place themſelves before him, and exerciſe towards him the various Affections which are his Due: detaching their Hearts, by theſe Means, from the World they are going to leave; and forming them more perfectly to the Temper and Employment of that State, of which they are now upon the Borders: not diſquieting themſelves, if they do not ſucceed in this as well as they could wiſh, but going on to do it as well as they can.

The remaining Duty of aged Perſons is to imprint on others, whenever they have Opportunity, the ſame right Sentiments of Life and Conduct which they have acquired themſelves. For it is St. *Paul*'s expreſs Injunction, that they be *Teachers of good Things*[b]. Too commonly they take juſt the contrary Courſe; firſt, live immorally; then ſeek for Arguments to make their own Minds eaſy in Wickedneſs; and laſtly, ſet up the Buſineſs of bringing over

[b] Tit. ii. 3.

Converts

Converts to it. And when the Authority of old Age is employed thus in ſerving Vice or Profaneneſs, eſpecially if it be adorned with Rank, or Wit, or the Reputation of Knowledge, it is capable of doing incredible Miſchief. But ſurely it might in all Reaſon ſuffice them that they have been bad themſelves: and there is no Manner of Need that they ſhould add to it the Guilt (which one ſhould think there were not any violent Temptation to) of corrupting others to no Purpoſe. It cannot be ſo evidently and ſo highly for the Intereſt of Mankind, to live without Principle and die without Hope, as to make it worth their while to become Preachers and Miſſionaries of Infidelity and Profligacy: a ſhocking Employment, by which ſome have choſen to make their grey Hairs deteſtable; and done many Times more Harm, by thus patronizing Sin, than before by committing it.

But another Sort, who miſlead the Young leſs viſibly, but very fatally, and in much greater Numbers, are they; who, having learnt, in their earlier Days, neither Notions of Religion nor Irreligion, nor of any Thing in the World but Profit or Pleaſures or Honours;

lead

lead others after them in the ſame wrong Way of thinking, and do infinite Miſchief, without ever conſidering, whether they do any.

Now the more there are amongſt thoſe to whom Age gives Influence, that, either deſignedly or inadvertently, promote Wickedneſs, the more zealous the Remainder ſhould be in oppoſing it: which, if they were, they might hope for great Succeſs. The Judgment of ſuch, as have weighed Things maturely, and ſeen and experienced their good and bad Conſequences long, and known the World throughly, and being now ready to quit it can have no farther Intereſt to ſerve in it, muſt be of great Weight, in Confirmation of what Reaſon and Religion teach: eſpecially if it be delivered with Prudence and Mildneſs, and proper Demonſtrations of true Good-will. Nor can there be a nobler Way of ſpending the Concluſion of Life than to exert all our Abilities, and all the Credit that we have acquired through the former Part of it, in doing the moſt important Service to thoſe whom we ſhall leave behind us: to redeem our own Miſcarriages by reclaiming others; to warn the Unthinking, confirm the Unſteady, and

give

give public Teſtimony, on full Trial, to the Cauſe of God and Goodneſs.

But then, beſides teſtifying in general, that this is the Way to Happineſs, the Aged have many Advantages for recommending more particularly, ſometimes one Duty, ſometimes another, as Need ſhall be. And beſides what Men uſually call Duties, there are other Things, no leſs really ſo, which they who have once gained Reſpect, may eaſily induce many of thoſe who know them, to practiſe to their great Benefit: that Prudence, which preſerves from Sin the beſt Way, by preventing Temptation; that Reaſonableneſs of Temper, and Propriety of Behaviour, in every common Incident, which habituate Men to the ſame Temper and Behaviour on Occaſions of Importance. Nay, Things that contribute nothing to the Morals of Men, if they be conducive in any Way to their Convenience or innocent Delight, it belongs to the Wiſdom of the Aged to be diligent in teaching: and whatever they have perceived in Life to be either good or bad, they are bound to admoniſh others to do or avoid; that ſo, when the Time comes, they may give up the World to thoſe that follow them, if poſſible, better than they found it;

or

or however, as little worſe as they can in every Reſpect.

Theſe then are the Directions, which Virtue and Religion furniſh, to make *the hoary Head a Crown of Glory*. What remains is to ſhew,

II. That, would we but obſerve them carefully and prudently, they muſt be effectual to that End: as far, I mean, as, in the preſent State of Things, any Inſtrument almoſt can be depended on for attaining any Purpoſe. And the Proof of this will lie in a ſmall Compaſs.

It is no Wonder in the leaſt that thoſe Perſons are deſtitute both of Honour and Comfort in their old Age, who have neither prepared as they ought for it, nor will behave as they ought in it. But to have born the various Trials of a long Life (many of them, God knows, very hard and difficult) with a Spirit and a Conduct well ſuited to each, and be ſtill going through the Remainder in the ſame Manner; or at leaſt, after deviating for a Time to have returned into the right Way again; with a genuine Concern for having ever forſaken it, and to be now making Amends by more exemplary Goodneſs for paſt Failings: theſe are Characters intitled to univerſal Eſteem. And though Length of Time may wear off ſuperficial

ficial Ornaments, yet the ſolid Merit of Diſintereſtedneſs and equitable Bounty, Mildneſs and good Temper, Sobriety, Modeſty, and Decency, ſerious Reflection, rational Piety towards God, and judicious Good-will towards Men, ſhewn in promoting Virtue, Prudence, and uſeful Knowledge; this, under all Diſadvantages of any other Kind, muſt have Charms, to which no one, that is not void of Diſcernment, can be inſenſible. *O how comely a Thing is Judgment for grey Hairs, and for antient Men to know Council! O how comely is the Wiſdom of old Men, and Underſtanding and Counſel to Men of Honour. Much Experience is the Crown of the Aged, and the Fear of God is their Glory* [c]. At Length indeed the Mind itſelf may come to bear great Marks of Decay, as well as the Body. But even then, the very Ruins of ſo beautiful and majeſtic a Structure will be looked on with Reverence. And as long as Perſons in Years can enjoy any Thing; ſuch Regard as this, paid by thoſe about them, in which Nature hath wiſely and kindly diſpoſed them to take peculiar Delight, muſt ſupport and revive them to a great Degree.

[c] Eccluſ xxv. 4, 5, 6.

But

But they have farther and moſt valuable Satisfactions, that depend not on others at all. As many as have proceeded ſo far in Life with Innocence, muſt feel from it the higheſt Joy: they who have truly repented, cannot fail to be ſenſible of much Conſolation. And the Delight of recollecting how happy it is, that they were not cut off in their former Sins, will more than outweigh their living to undergo not a few Sufferings. Beſides, if old Age brings on ſome Uneaſineſſes, it removes others. Many Paſſions grow calm then, which formerly, if they did not hurry us into Follies and Crimes, gave us much Trouble to govern them: many Afflictions, that once were exceeding bitter, ſoften by Degrees into a pleaſing Kind of melancholy Remembrance. And though, the longer we live, the greater Number of mournful Spectacles we muſt ſee; yet a ſuitable Proviſion is made in our Frame, that as Age increaſes, we are, generally ſpeaking, leſs and leſs affected by whatever Loſs happens to us. Then, under the heavieſt Burthens that we experience, it muſt ſurely be ſome Relief to think, that there cannot be a great deal more to come upon us. In the Beginning of Life we have large Room to be

appre-

apprehenſive concerning what may befall us during the Courſe of it. But towards the Cloſe, when almoſt all is got tolerably over, and neither Temptations, nor Misfortunes, nor Dangers, private or public, can give us any long Diſquiet; to be ſo near finiſhing our Voyage, and juſt entering into Port, muſt needs inſpire us with great Tranquillity and Peace of Mind. From old Age, as from a Station of Security, Men may look back with Complacence on the Hazards they have eſcaped, and delight themſelves anew in the Gratifications they have enjoyed, For to lament their being paſt, when we have had our due Share of them, is both Ingratitude and Abſurdity. Indeed it is a conſiderable Felicity in our Make, and ſeems calculated particularly for the Benefit of the Aged, that the Memory of paſt Pleaſures is agreeable, and yet that of paſt Sorrows far from painful.

But farther ſtill; recalling to their Thoughts the Perſons and Occurrences they have known, the Times that have gone over their Heads, and the wonderful Diſpenſations of Providence to themſelves or others, with which they have been filled, muſt be a fruitful Source of improving Amuſement to them; and

relating

relating theſe Things, an acceptable Entertainment and Inſtruction to others. Years, as they advance, do indeed leſſen our Activity; but perhaps by no Means our Uſefulneſs: for to adviſe and direct is both the ſuperior Part, and that for which fewer are qualified, than for executing what is reſolved. Or, to put Matters at the loweſt, how little ſoever the Aged have an Opportunity of doing, they have at leaſt that of ſuffering, as becomes good Chriſtians; of bearing the Inconveniencies of their Condition with a chearful Acquieſcence; and being content to be uſeleſs, if Infinite Wiſdom ſees it fit they ſhould. So that the very ſame Infirmities, which diſable them from exerciſing ſome Virtues, directly lead them to exerciſe others, though not ſo conſpicuous, amongſt Men, yet as truly valuable in the Sight of God, and therefore as ſure to increaſe their Reward. Whatever then is the Will of their Heavenly Father, they are prepared for. If it be his Pleaſure, that they ſhould languiſh on here, they have great Encouragement to *wait* with Patience *all the Days of their appointed Time till their Change come*[4]. And if he calls them ſoon, they have

[4] Job xiv. 14.

all

all poſſible Reaſon to obey willingly; and yield up their Breath with Thankfulneſs into his Hands who hath indulged them ſo long an Uſe of it, and knows it would be no more a Bleſſing to them. *O Death, acceptable is thy Sentence unto him whoſe Strength faileth, that is now in the laſt Age and vexed with all Things* [e]! Well may ſuch reſign their Spirit quietly to him who gave it, and praiſe his Goodneſs, that *they go to their Grave in a full Age, like as a Shock of Corn cometh in, in its Seaſon* [f].

To die, is juſt as natural as to be born. That *one Generation ſhould paſs away, and another come* [g], is the ſettled Law of Things. Our Predeceſſors have made Way for us, and it is but fitting, that we ſhould make Way for our Succeſſors: that they alſo, in their Turn, may enjoy the Pleaſures of Life, and feel its Pains; buſy themſelves, and be talked of; die, and be forgotten. *Fear not* therefore *the Sentence of Death. Remember them that have been before thee, and that come after thee. For this is the Sentence of the Lord over all Fleſh; and why art thou againſt the Pleaſure of the Moſt High* [h]? Still it is very true, the Manner in which we

[e] Ecclus xli. 2. [f] Job v. 26. [g] Ecclus i. 4.
[h] Ecclus xli. 3, 4.

are to paſs out of the preſent World, though a great Part of its Terrors are mere Imagination, hath yet ſomething in it ſhocking enough; eſpecially when we conſider it as being originally the Puniſhment of Sin. And though, at a proper Period, we may have a Satiety of this earthly Life, as well as of other Things here: yet to expect the intire Loſs of our Being then, would be a Thought of dreadful Gloomineſs; and were this to be our Caſe at Death, it muſt affect thinking Perſons, on whom that awful Change was coming immediately, with a Dejection and Horror ſcarce to be born. But our gracious Redeemer hath *delivered them, who elſe through Fear of Death, would all their Life-time*, and eſpecially at the Cloſe of it, have been *ſubject to Bondage*[i]. To Believers in Him the bleſſed Knowledge of a better State ſhines forth, totally changes the Proſpect, and makes our ſtanding on the Brink of this Life, in Truth, the joyfulleſt Situation we were ever in: for what can be better for us, than that *this Corruptible ſhould put on Incorruption, this Mortal Immortality*[k]?

[i] Heb. ii. 15. [k] 1 Cor. xv. 53.

For

For the vicious indeed old Age hath no Comfort, and much Terror. There have been few Things in their paſt Lives, that can give them Pleaſure when reflected on; and many, that muſt give them inexpreſſible Concern. For the proper Satisfactions of their preſent Condition they have never learnt to have any Reliſh; and the Thoughts of their approaching one, it will be hard for them to avoid, and yet much harder to ſupport. A moſt dreadful Dilemma: to be weary of this Life, yet afraid of the next; and the ſtrongeſt Fears to fall infinitely ſhort of what there is to be feared. But to the aged pious Chriſtian, the Conſideration of hereafter, if dwelt on as it ought, almoſt annihilates every Thing that could diſquiet him here. He will never regret that he is no longer qualified for worldly Enjoyment, when he thinks of the unſpeakable Bliſs that he knows is at Hand, nor faint under worldly Afflictions, *which are but for a Moment*, ſince they are *working out for him* ſo ſoon *eternal Glory*[1]. The Puniſhment prepared for the Wicked ſtrike him with no Terrors; but the Rewards prepared for the Righteous fill him with ſuch Comfort, that *though his outward*

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

*Man periſh, yet his inward Man is renewed Day by Day*[m]; when *his Fleſh and his Heart faileth*, he triumphs in the Declaration, that *God is the Strength of his Heart, and his Portion for ever*[n]. There may poſſibly have been much wanting hitherto of the Eſteem and Honour, with which his *hoary Head* was intitled to be *crowned*; but now, *having fought the good Fight and finiſhed his Courſe, henceforth there is aſſuredly laid up for him a Crown of Righteouſneſs, which the Lord the righteous Judge ſhall give him at that Day*[o].

[m] 2 Cor. iv. 16. [n] Pſ. lxxiii. 26. [o] 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

SER-

# SERMON VII.

1 TIM. vi. 17, 18.

*Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor truſt in uncertain Riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all Things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good Works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate.*

EVERY Condition of Life hath its peculiar Dangers to be avoided, and Duties to be done, but none hath Dangers more threatening or Duties more important, than that of the Rich and Great: whoſe Situation, notwithſtanding, is ſeldom conſidered by thoſe who are in it, as having any Thing to be feared; and is generally imagined by others, to comprehend almoſt every Thing, that is to be wiſhed. Now the Miſtakes even of the lower Part of the World concerning this Matter are attend-

ed with ſome exceeding bad Conſequences; diſpoſing them very unreaſonably to envy their Superiors, and be uneaſy at their own Lot. But the Miſtakes of the Rich and Great themſelves concerning the Advantages and Obligations of their Station, produce the moſt fatal Effects that can be, on themſelves and all around them. And it greatly adds to the Unhappineſs of their Caſe, that whilſt they have many Things to divert their Attention from what is right, and prompt them to what is wrong; to make the gratifying of their bad Inclinations eaſy; and ſupport them in the World, let them act as they will; they have commonly ſcarce any one to remind them, if they act amiſs. Intimations of Miſbehaviour, however prudently given, are to moſt Perſons diſagreeable: but to Perſons of Rank they appear diſreſpectful too. And ſuch of them, as will bear to be told of their managing their Healths or their Fortunes ill, ſhew a great Reluctance to let their Conduct, in Point of Religion or Morals, be touched with any Seriouſneſs. So that, juſt where they need Admonition moſt, they have the leaſt given them. It is but few, that can with Propriety uſe Freedom enough with them, to do any Good:

for,

for, to ſlight and diſtant Hints they think no ſerious Regard is due. And amongſt thoſe that can, there are fewer yet that will undertake an Office, in which they have little Proſpect either of Succeſs or Thanks. Indeed the Generality of thoſe that come about them, in all Likelihood, mean nothing but their own Intereſt, or their own Amuſement: and theſe, they may be ſure, will take Care never to offend them by giving them good Advice: but there is much Cauſe to ſuſpect, what the Great, notwithſtanding, ſeldom do ſuſpect, that they will often court them by giving them bad: or, if they do not directly perſuade them into Sin, (which might ſometimes be too groſs Behaviour) will however more covertly diſpoſe them to it; encourage and countenance them in it; either to bring about ſome particular End, which they have to ſerve by it, or with a general View of making themſelves agreeable.

To be thus environed with Temptations, and probably ſenſible of none of them, is a moſt pitiable Condition. And yet the Rich and Great, when they are led wrong, do not ſo deſerve Compaſſion, as not to deſerve much Blame too. For as there are ſome Things to excuſe their Faults, there are many that aggra-

vate them. Their Education, ſo coſtly and laboured in ſeveral Reſpects, muſt have been conducted with the abſurdeſt Negligence in the moſt material; if it hath not given them a much ſuperior Knowledge of their Duty, to that which common Perſons can uſually acquire. Their Diſengagement afterwards from Cares, that others are ſwallowed up in, affords them peculiar Leiſure for Thought and Recollection; and the vaſt and evident Importance of their whole Behaviour, on ſuch a Multitude of Accounts, one ſhould think could not fail of engaging their Attention to every Step they take. So that if they have fewer occaſional Admonitions given them; it might be hoped they would have leſs Need of them: for their very Situation admoniſhes them conſtantly, that they are raiſed by Providence above others, in order to be Authors and Examples of Good, not Evil, to their Fellow-creatures. This is directly their Buſineſs and Truſt: it is the nobleſt and happieſt that can be. The Labours of it are ſoftened by many honourable and pleaſing Diſtinctions, which God hath beſtowed on them; for which he will juſtly expect they ſhall make him a Return: if it be ſuch as it ought, they will be eminent for ever

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in the next World, as well as for a few Days in this: And how can Perſons be excuſable, that are uninfluenced by ſuch Conſiderations?

It is very true, our Saviour doth expreſs in very ſtrong Terms, the Difficulty of a rich Man's entering into the Kingdom of Heaven. But he means, of ſuch a one's profeſſing himſelf a Subject of Chriſt: which required uncommon Reſolution at that Time, when all worldly Advantages were to be given up, and the bittereſt Perſecutions undergone for the Sake of the Goſpel. Yet even then no Man was excuſed, either from embracing or practiſing Chriſtianity: much leſs now. And if at all Times the Great have Temptations beyond others, they have alſo Reaſons beyond others for ſtruggling with them, and will be rewarded beyond others for overcoming them. Therefore St. *Paul* in the Text gives them no Diſpenſations, but only provides for them ſtronger Warnings; and inſtead of authoriſing the Miniſters of God's Word to wink at their Faults, requires that they admoniſh them with ſingular Earneſtneſs to perform their Duties: the only Prerogative in Relation to this Matter that can be allowed them. But as in general the leaſt offenſive, and therefore moſt

efficacious

efficacious Way of admoniſhing, is by publick Inſtruction, we uſually confine ourſelves to that; and the upper Part of Mankind ought to attend upon it more conſtantly, and hearken to it more ſeriouſly, in Proportion as they are leſs likely to be told their Faults and their Dangers, in private, to good Purpoſe: and ſhould *ſuffer the Word of Exhortation*[a] to be given with greater Plainneſs and Freedom to them all in common, the greater Objections there are againſt taking any conſiderable Liberties with each of them ſingly.

And as thoſe of middle Rank, may yet when compared with their Inferiors, be conſidered as highly exalted, and do accordingly conſider themſelves as ſuch: all Degrees above the loweſt, are concerned to obſerve the Apoſtle's Charge: and the very loweſt will find their own Failures, and their own Obligations intermixed of Courſe with what will be ſaid about thoſe of their Betters.

Now the peculiar Dangers of the Rich and Great (for though the Apoſtle names only the former, the Connexion is ſo cloſe, that he may well be underſtood to mean both) ariſes either from the Eminence of their Station, or the

[a] Heb. xiii. 22.

Abundance

Abundance of their Wealth: and therefore the Text points a Caution againſt each. But I ſhall be able at preſent to treat only of the firſt: which is, *that they be not high-minded.*

Every Superiority, of every Sort, which Men only imagine themſelves poſſeſſed of, is too liable both to be over-rated and improperly uſed. But ſuperior Fortune and Condition are Advantages ſo viſible to all Eyes, create ſuch Dependences, and give ſuch Influence; that it is no wonder, if they tempt to uncommon Haughtineſs. Even ſuch as riſe to them by Accident, are ſo eager to have all the World acknowledge them to be what they are juſt become, that they often quite forget what they were a while before. Such as acquire them by their own Application and Abilities, hardly ever fail to think very highly of themſelves on that Account. And they who are born to them, uſually ſet out from the firſt with deſpiſing thoſe beneath them: as indeed to be deſcended from Anceſtors of Note; to bear a Name which others have been accuſtomed to reſpect; to enjoy perhaps hereditary Honours, and on every Occaſion to be addreſſed in other Language, than is uſed to the vulgar Sort of Men; theſe Things are enough

enough to overſet the Minds of the Weak: and they have ſome Degree of wrong Effect upon moſt; more, perhaps, than they themſelves are ſenſible of.

Now undoubtedly diſtinguiſhed Rank is intitled to diſtinguiſhed Regard: and the good Order of Society very much depends on keeping up that Regard: and therefore the Great ſhould in a proper Manner be much more careful to keep it up, than many of them are. For indeed their Condeſcenſions and Familiarities, are often with ſuch very wrong Perſons, and in ſuch very wrong Ways, that preſerving an overdiſtant Behaviour would, of the two, be much the better, both for themſelves, and thoſe whom they are pleaſed to honour with their Intimacy. But when they nurſe up the Conſciouſneſs of their own Superiority into a contemptuous Neglect of others, and inſolent Expectations of unfit Submiſſions from them; they have great Need to be reminded, that Reſpect is paid to Wealth and Birth, becauſe the common Good requires it, not becauſe the Perſons who receive it, are always worthy of it: and when they are unworthy, they have much more Reaſon to be humble on their own Account, than vain on Account of their Eſtates

or

or their Anceſtors. The Wiſe and Good indeed will ſhew them the outward Regard, to which they are intitled: but inward they muſt expect from none, except the Weak and Inconſiderate: nor will the falſe Appearances of it from the Artful and Intereſted do them any Service: but their diſhonourable Behaviour will be the more conſpicuous for their honourable Station.

And even ſuppoſing them guilty of nothing elſe to leſſen the Eſteem they claim: yet claiming too much of it, or too openly, will fruſtrate their Intention moſt effectually. For neither Equals nor Inferiors will ſuffer near ſo much to be extorted from them, as they would have beſtowed moſt freely on their own Accord. Haughtineſs therefore towards all, who are not abſolute Dependants, is a moſt ridiculous Thing; and to ſuch as are, it is a very imprudent one. For the Higheſt lie greatly at the Mercy even of thoſe who ſerve them, and attend upon them; in Reſpect of their Characters, their Credit and Weight in the World, their Fortunes, their Eaſe, their very Safety. And therefore to treat thoſe, who are ever ſo much at our Command, with ſuch Humanity and Affability, as may ſecure

their good Opinion and good Will, is mere common honeſt Policy.

But one Sort of Condeſcenſion to Inferiors may be of peculiar Advantage; I mean, liſtening to uſeful Information and Advice from them: Things, which the Great are very apt to think themſelves above, when every one elſe ſees they have much Need of them. *The rich Man*, as *Solomon* obſerves, *is wiſe in his own Conceit: but the Poor, that hath Underſtanding, ſearcheth him out* [b]. Neither Affluence, nor high Rank, by any Means imply Superiority of Judgment; or if they did, the beſt Judgments often want to be inſtructed in the Nature and Circumſtances of what they are to judge upon; and indeed to be guarded againſt the Miſtakes, to which Inexperience, Inadvertence, or unſeen Prejudices, may expoſe them. And the more important any Matter is, and the leſs carefully and ſeriouſly we have weighed it, the more Neceſſity there evidently appears, that we ſhould hear others in Relation to it. How attentively then ſhould the Greateſt hear the appointed Teachers of Religion: the *one Thing needful* [c] to their eternal Happineſs; and perhaps the very Thing that many of them have

[b] Prov. xxviii. 11. [c] Luke x. 42.

hitherto

hitherto conſidered the leaſt, yet poſſibly ſet themſelves the moſt to deſpiſe and ridicule! But in their worldly Affairs too, it might prevent innumerable Errors and Diſtreſſes, if they would vouchſafe, on fit Occaſions, to receive and encourage Leſſons of Wiſdom from thoſe beneath them. This, you will eaſily diſcern, is a very different Matter from being led and governed: to which the moſt ſelf-ſufficient of Men, under artful Management, are often the moſt ſubject. It is governing ourſelves by exerting the rational Powers, which God hath given us, inſtead of being Slaves to our Paſſions and Fancies. We cannot alter Truth: and therefore, how exalted ſoever our Condition be, we ſhould think it no Diſgrace, but the higheſt Honour, to ſubmit to it. Nor is the Obligation of doing ſo in the leaſt different, whether we diſcover it ourſelves, or learn it from others. If Reaſon hath at all a Right to direct us; it hath an equal Right, whence ſoever it comes. And the moſt truly conſiderable Perſons have always been the readieſt to follow the Opinion of ſuch, as were in all Reſpects their Inferiors, whenever they happened to be in the Right. Nor is there perhaps any Part of Humility,

that

that can give us more Reputation than this, or do us more Service.

But if Humility in the Great could be no other Way beneficial to them; yet avoiding the Guilt of ſo injurious a Behaviour, as indulging a proud Spirit prompts them to, is ſurely a Motive important enough. Hence it is that inſtead of *learning* Forgiveneſs of *him*, who was *meek and lowly in Heart* [a], they often reſent Offences of very ſmall Conſequence, nay undeſigned ones, very immoderately; and ſome, even to the demanding of the Blood of others at the Hazard of their own. And though perhaps they themſelves began the Injury, yet they imagine their Honour binds them to violate the Laws of God and Man in Order to revenge it: which abſurd Notion they have patronized in the World, till Perſons, ſo far beneath them, have taken it up, that one ſhould hope they might be induced to lay it down for that Reaſon, if not for better. But the Haughtineſs of the Great, without being combined with Anger, doth in cold Blood infinite Miſchief. And they ſhould conſider, that it is the ſame Aggravation of the Fault, if one who is juſtly poſſeſſed of Superiority al-

[a] Matt. xi. 29.

ready,

ready, unjuſtly affects more; as it would be in the rich to pilfer and rob. In Countries of legal Liberty indeed, there is not ſo much Room, for the Pride of the upper Part of the World to bear hard upon the lower. And truly both may thank God for it: the one that they are thus delivered from the Temptation; the other from the Suffering. For very dreadful is both the Wickedneſs and the Miſery, to which unlimited Power leads: and *Solomon* deſcribes the latter very pathetically: *I returned and conſidered all the Oppreſſions, that are done under the Sun: and behold, the Fears of ſuch as were oppreſſed, and they had no Comforter: and on the Side of their Oppreſſors was Power; but they had no Comforter. Wherefore I praiſed the Dead, that are already dead, more than the Living, which are yet alive. Yea, better is he, than both they, which hath not yet been; and hath not ſeen the evil Work, that is done under the Sun*[e]. But though a merciful Providence hath preſerved this Nation, freer than any other, from ſuch Extremities; yet every where the Rich and Great make their Inferiors ſuffer a great deal too much; ſometimes by a deſigned and ſtudied Haughtineſs, often

[e] Eccl. iv. 1, 2, 3.

by a careleſs and contemptuous one, which renders them inattentive to what thoſe in lower Life may feel; when perhaps from Principle, ſuch as it is, they would avoid doing Injuries to their Equals, and are by no Means without Tenderneſs towards them.

Thus too many treat their Tenants hardly, or permit them to be ſo treated: ſometimes indeed from Avarice; ſometimes from the Urgency of Wants which Follies and Vices have created; but frequently, from not thinking it worth while to inquire, whether ſuch mean Creatures are well or ill uſed, and refuſing to be troubled, with their Complaints and Remonſtrances; which, though often groundleſs, may often likewiſe be very juſt. Now were we in this wretched Caſe, we ſhould ſoon diſcern it to be extremely cruel in our Superiors, to imagine us undeſerving of being regarded and eaſed in bad Times, or under the Preſſure of unexpected Accidents; to indulge their own Love of Money, or keep up their idle Expenſiveneſs to the full, whatever we and our Families might undergo, whoſe Labour muſt pay for all; to throw new Burthens upon us, not becauſe we were able to bear them, but becauſe they were unwilling; to ſubject us,

without Redreſs, to the Partialities and Reſentments of their Agents, or cruſh us under the Weight of their own; obliging us perhaps to ſeek a Livelihood elſewhere to our certain Loſs and probable Ruin, if at any Time we were leſs obſequious to them than they required, though on Occaſions where we ought to be left free. Such Behaviour all Men would think exceedingly barbarous, were they to experience it: and therefore all ſhould reſolve never to be guilty of it, and apply to this Caſe amongſt others, that admirable Exhortation of the Son of *Sirach*: *Make not an hungry Soul ſorrowful; neither provoke a Man in his Diſtreſs: reject not the Supplication of the Afflicted, neither turn away thy Face from a poor Man. Turn not away thine Eye from the Needy, and give him no Occaſion to curſe thee. For if he curſe thee in the Bitterneſs of his Soul, his Prayer ſhall be heard of him that made him.—Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine Ear to the Poor; and give him a friendly Anſwer, with Meekneſs*[t].

Another Sort of Perſons, for whom Superiors too commonly will not vouchſafe to have the Conſideration that they ought, are thoſe who come to them upon Buſineſs. Obliging

[t] Eccluſ iv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 8.

ſuch to an unreaſonable Attendance, making them wait long, and it may be return often, (when perhaps only Idleneſs, or Caprice, or Occupations that might well be interrupted, prevent their being diſpatched immediately) is a very provoking and a very injurious Kind of Statelineſs. Time ought to be precious to all Men; and is peculiarly precious to thoſe, who have Affairs and Appointments to fill it with, that either muſt be attended on, each in its Seaſon, or they and theirs muſt ſuffer, perhaps be undone. And were it conſidered, but near ſo much as it ought, how very large a Share of the Time of others, a few of theſe proud or thoughtleſs Men are ſufficient to conſume, it would be found a Matter of no ſmall Seriouſneſs.

But there is another Fault ſtill worſe frequently joined with this; deeming it beneath their Notice, whether ſuch of their Inferiors, as have juſt and reaſonable Demands upon them, are paid when they ought. At the ſame Time they would think it infamous not to pay, what they loſe to the vileſt Wretch in the pernicious Practice of gaming, though the Law, for the publick good, diſcourages and almoſt forbids their doing it. Notwithſtanding

ſtanding which, by a monſtrous Perverſion of Language, they call theſe laſt their Debts of Honour, in Oppoſition to the former. It is very true, that Motives, not at all akin to Pride, frequently induce thoſe of high Rank to neglect or even refuſe ſatisfying their Creditors. But ſo far as they take Liberties in this Reſpect, which, were they leſs conſiderable in the World, they would not dare to take and probably would not think of taking; ſo far their Injuſtice ariſes from a haughty Confidence in their own Greatneſs, and a contemptuous Indifference, to what Inconveniencies and Difficulties they expoſe others. There needs but a little Conſideration to ſee, what exquiſite Diſtreſſes ſuch a Conduct muſt produce; and how pitiable the Situation of thoſe poor People muſt be; who, on Pain of loſing all their Buſineſs, dare not refuſe Credit; and yet are in a likely Way to be ruined, if they give it. The common Method of ſaving themſelves, I fear, is, by making unreaſonable Gains from the good Part of their Cuſtomers, to indemnify themſelves for the Delays, and often final Diſappointments, which they meet with from the bad. But this is plainly puniſhing ſuch as uſe them well, for the Faults of others

who uſe them ill: a Behaviour of which no one ſhould be guilty, and therefore no one ſhould be driven to it; but leaſt of all by thoſe, whoſe Circumſtances either do or might exempt them the moſt intirely from any Neceſſity of ſuch Injuſtice. The Care of being punctual in the Diſcharge of their Debts, and conſiderate, for that Purpoſe, in comparing their Income and Expences, and attentive to keep the latter within the Compaſs of the former, far from being below the greateſt, enables them to ſhew themſelves truly great on many Occaſions, when otherwiſe they could not: but the Figure which they make in the Eyes of Mankind, amidſt all their Splendor, for the want of this Care; and the poor Arts, to which they are obliged to condeſcend, for quieting their Creditors, and ſupporting their Extravagances, are extremely unſuitable to a Station, that claims diſtinguiſhed Reſpect.

Another, very blameable, and very pernicious Inſtance of High-mindedneſs in the Great, is, imagining the Management of their Families an Attention too low for them. Even that of their Children they very commonly deſpiſe to an aſtoniſhing Degree. And yet think it no Diſhonour, to throw away on every

Trifle

Trifle and Folly, that they can hunt out, many of thoſe Hours, a few of which might do a great deal towards making Life a Bleſſing, (which now through their Fault is often a Curſe) to thoſe whom they have brought into it. Or if they have Humility enough to inſpect ſome Part of their Education, it is uſually the outward and ſhewy, but leaſt material Part: and they would be aſhamed of the Suppoſition of their taking any ſerious Pains, to plant in them thoſe Principles of Religion and Virtue, on learning which the preſent and future Happineſs of their Children depends; and their own, on teaching them. If Perſons can treat the very *Fruit of their Body*[s] in ſuch a Manner; no wonder, if the Servants under their Roof are treated amiſs. And yet a tender Regard to the meaneſt of them is unqueſtionably the Duty of the higheſt of thoſe who employ them. For our common Humanity requires, that their diſadvantageous Condition be not rendered more ſo than it needs, either by Deſign or Negligence, of which Nature hath given them as a ſtrong Feeling as their Betters. And therefore, of our own Accord, we ſhould inquire and conſider about them: when they

[s] Mich. vi. 7.

offer Complaints, we ſhould receive them; and if there be ſome Impropriety in the Manner of making them, paſs over that, as proceeding perhaps from Ignorance, perhaps from a preſent Senſe of ſuffering; look to the Subſtance of what they alledge, and grant them due Redreſs. Again, when they ſeem to be in a Fault, we ſhould ſubmit to hear patiently, and examine equitably, every Plea they have to make. For there may be Circumſtances of no ſmall Weight, in their Favour, both as to what they remonſtrate about, and what they are accuſed of, which we may not have rightly underſtood or conſidered; and therefore ſhould permit them to be laid before us. Otherwiſe we treat them as unworthy of common Juſtice, and incur that Guilt, which *Job* hath expreſſed in ſuch affecting Words that they can never be omitted, when this Subject is mentioned. *If I did deſpiſe the Cauſe of my Man-ſervant, or my Maid-ſervant, when they contended with me; what ſhall I do when God riſeth up, and when he viſiteth, what ſhall I anſwer him? Did not he that made me, make him: and did not one faſhion us in the Womb* [h]*?*

[h] Job xxxi. 13, 14, 15.

I am

I am very ſenſible, that entering in Perſon too minutely into the Particulars of every ſmall domeſtick Concern, may ſit ill upon People of Rank; and perhaps be inconſiſtent with their Attention to Affairs of more Importance. But ſo far as they can with any Propriety look into Things, they ſhould be careful, not only to behave mildly and equitably to their Servants themſelves, but to ſee that they behave ſo one to another. For in large Families eſpecially, there are ſometimes dreadful Grievances of this Kind: and requiſite Subordination may be ſufficiently preſerved, without either countenancing or permitting Oppreſſion.

Not that, under Colour of Gentleneſs to them, we ſhould ſuffer them to live uncontrolled, and to do as they pleaſe. This would be a falſe good Nature, and extenſively pernicious. We may think perhaps, that we ſhall hurt Nobody by it, but ourſelves; and even this we ought not to do. But indeed, along with ourſelves, we ſhall hurt the Fortunes, it may be the Morals too, of thoſe who ought to be deareſt to us; for wicked Servants are dangerous Corrupters: we ſhall ſet an Example of ill Management in our own Families, which will make it more difficult for

others

others to manage theirs well: and we ſhall do the greateſt Prejudice of all to thoſe, who will probably at preſent the leaſt complain of it; I mean the poor Wretches, whom we indulge ſo wrongly. For it is hardly to be hoped, but that our Negligence about their Conduct, will tempt them, either to be diſhoneſt, or idle, or waſteful, in our Service; or vicious and diſſolute; or however, forgetful of their Duty to God. And we owe it to them, as we have taken them under our Care, to preſerve them, if we can, from all theſe Sins; to direct their Steps in the Ways of Religion and Virtue; and not expoſe them to Ruin here, and Miſery hereafter, for want of vouchſafing to look a little after them: a ſhocking Inſtance of Haughtineſs in Relation to *our Brethren for whom Chriſt died*[1].

I have enlarged ſo long on theſe Particulars, in which the upper Part of the World are too *high-minded*, to attend to their Duty; that I muſt comprehend the reſt in a very few Words; which I beg all, who are concerned, to reflect upon more diſtinctly, and apply to themſelves impartially. Whoever makes his Rank or his Wealth a Privilege, either to ſay

[1] 1 Cor. viii. 11.

or

or do Things to any one that are injurious or unbecoming; or to omit Things that are right and good: whoever makes uſe of his Inferiors for his own Advantage or Amuſement, to their Inconvenience, and neglects them when he hath done: whoever expects more from them, in any Reſpect, than he hath a reaſonale Claim to; or makes his Superiority, by the Oſtentation of it painful, or by the Miſuſe of it detrimental, juſtly falls under the Apoſtle's Charge, as a *high-minded* Offender againſt Man and God. And though Offences of this Kind are henious in all Perſons, yet they are peculiarly ſo in Chriſtians; whoſe Rule, which they profeſs to follow, is: *Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly Love; in Honour preferring one another: mind not high Things, but condeſcend to Men of low Eſtate*[k]. *Let nothing be done through Strife or vain Glory, but in Lowlineſs of Mind let each eſteem other better than themſelves. Look not every Man on his own Things, but every Man alſo on the Things of others. Let this Mind be in you which was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus, who being in the Form of God, took on him the Form of a Servant,*

[k] Rom. xiii. 10, 16.

*and*

*and humbled himſelf unto Death, even the Death of the Croſs*[l]. *All of you be ſubject one to another, and be clothed with Humility: for God reſiſteth the Proud, and giveth Grace to the Humble*[m].

[l] Phil. ii. 3—8. [m] 1 Pet. v. 5.

SER-

# SERMON VIII.

1 TIM. vi. 17, 18.

*Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor truſt in uncertain Riches; but in the living God, who giveth us richly all Things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good Works; ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate.*

IN this Paſſage the Apoſtle requires the Miniſters of God's Word, firſt, to caution Perſons of Wealth and Rank againſt the Sins of which they are peculiarly in Danger: then to lay before them the Duties, to which they are peculiarly bound. I have endeavoured already to obey his Injunction, in Relation to the former of the two Sins, which he ſpecifies, that of *being high-minded*; and now proceed to the latter, *truſting in uncertain Riches:* which Phraſe comprehends placing the Happineſs of

Life either in Wealth itſelf, or in thoſe Pleaſures and Amuſements, which it is commonly made the Inſtrument of procuring. The Prohibition therefore of doing this extends to regulate the Acquiſition, the Poſſeſſion and Uſe of a great Fortune: and to go through the Subject fully, each of theſe Points muſt be conſidered.

1. The Acquiſition. In Speculation it ſeems hardly to be expected, that any one, who is once Maſter of enough to anſwer his real and reaſonable Wants, ſhould feel any Deſire almoſt, on his own Account, of having more: that he ſhould take much Pains about it, is very wonderful; and that he ſhould do any Thing wrong for it, quite unaccountable. But that they, who have ſuperfluous Wealth already, ſhould both diſquiet themſelves and injure others merely to obtain a larger Superfluity, is incredibly abſurd. And yet, in Fact, theſe are the Perſons whoſe Paſſion for augmenting their Incomes is uſually the ſtrongeſt. *When Riches increaſe, ſet not your Heart upon them*, is the Caution of Scripture[a]; and accordingly the Son of *Sirach* pronounces, *Bleſſed is the Rich, that is found without Blemiſh, and hath not gone*

[a] Pſ. lxii. 10.

*after*

*after Gold. Who is he? and we will call him bleſſed; for wonderful Things hath he done among his People. Who hath been tried thereby, and found perfect? then let him glory*[b]. For indeed neither the mean nor the unjuſt Things, to which Neceſſity prompts the Poor, are to be compared with thoſe, which Perſons, far above Neceſſity, will notwithſtanding do for Gain. Too many there are, who ſeem to account their Follies and their Vices in the Number of Things neceſſary; and though they have abundantly ſufficient to live according to their Rank, provided they would live prudently and virtuouſly, will ſubmit to acquire, by wicked Means, what they want only to ſupport them in wicked Courſes. And others, though unable to find out either good or bad Uſes for what they have already, yet are not at all the leſs eager for adding more to it; but will do almoſt any Thing to enlarge, what they enjoy nothing from, except, as *Solomon* obſerves, *beholding it with their Eyes*[c]; and he hath obſerved further, that *the Eye is not ſatisfied with ſeeing*[d]. Deſires increaſe continually, and Cares along with them. Such Acquiſitions cannot

[b] Ecclus xxxi. 8, 9, 10. [c] Eccl. v. 11. [d] Eccl. i. 8. Comp. iv. 8. v. 10.

really

really promote even their preſent Happineſs; or ſuppoſing they could, yet if uſing unfair or low Arts to ſerve their own Intereſts be excuſable in the Wealthy, in whom it is that any Thing is inexcuſable? No Temptation is a Warrant for doing wrong; but to do wrong, without any Thing that deſerves the Name of a Temptation, is exceedingly bad. And it cannot be Nature, but merely an abſurd Habit, wilfully indulged, that tempts Men to accumulate what they have no Need of.

But though Riches alone render Eagerneſs for more very blameable and unbecoming, yet Greatneſs added to them doubles the Fault. For exalted Rank abſolutely calls for the Exerciſe of honourable Diſintereſtedneſs. And there are ſeveral Things, in Strictneſs, very lawful and honeſt, which yet are beneath People of Condition; who, as far as they can with any tolerable Prudence, ought ever to avoid the Shadow of a mean Action; and leave no Room for the Imputation of being miſled by ſordid Motives in any Part of Life. For who ſhall ſet the Example of reſiſting ſuch Conſiderations, if they give Way to them? And yet what Sort of Example is there more needful

needful or more beneficial? Not that People of Birth and Fortune ought to think themſelves above all Views, either of private Advantage or of due Recompence for their public Services. This, in many Caſes, would be a falſe and romantic Delicacy; unreaſonably detrimental to themſelves and their Families, and productive of no Benefit, but Harm, to the World around them. But in every Caſe, to act with a ſteady Regard to Truth and Right and common Good, and, without Heſitation, to prefer their Character before their Intereſt, when they interfere, is indeed the general Duty of all Men, but of the Rich and Great above all. Whoever violates it in private Life is almoſt ſure to contract an Infamy, that will make his Gains a dear Purchaſe. And in Affairs of a more public Nature the Guilt at leaſt is the ſame; often greater, as the Miſchief done, or however the bad Example ſet, is more extenſive. I am very ſenſible how common it is for Men of Serioufneſs and Worth in other Reſpects, not to conſider theſe Things as Matter of Conſcience at all, and accordingly to take ſtrange Liberties in Relation to them. But a little impartial Reflection would ſoon ſhew, that both Reaſon and Religion prohibit

the obſtructing of uſeful Meaſures by Oppoſition, forwarding bad ones by Subſerviency, encouraging Wickedneſs or Worthleſſneſs, departing from Juſtice and Equity, for any ſelfiſh or any party End whatever. Were even a general Good propoſed to be ſerved by it, *Evil* is not to be *done that Good may come*[e]; nor will any come from it that would not have been more effectually obtained, and longer preſerved, by other Means. And as for Good merely perſonal, whoever aims at that by Methods hurtful to his Country, whatever outward Advantages he may get by it, will loſe all Title to Peace within. And it will be found, if not ſoon, yet, which is worſe, too late, that his own Intereſt, and that of his Poſterity, are ſo connected with the Intereſt of the whole, that all Advantages, made by a Behaviour inconſiſtent with it, will be truly *uncertain Riches*, as the Text calls them; will *make themſelves Wings and fly away*[f], in the Time of general Calamity; or perhaps long before, in the preceding general Wickedneſs, which he hath been inſtrumental in haſtening on: and then Reproach and Shame will be the only Portion left to him or his. But how righteous.

[e] Rom. iii. 8. [f] Prov. xxiii. 5.

ſoever the Acquiſition of their Wealth may have been, the *Rich in this World* have Need that a Charge be given them,

2. Concerning the Poſſeſſion of it. In the Poſſeſſion alone, ſome of them ſeem to have placed the whole of its Value; *making* literally, as *Job* expreſſes it, *Gold their Hope, and ſaying to the fine Gold, Thou art my Confidence*[s]: and neither employing it to any Benefit of their own, nor of any one elſe. Now keeping a Heap of Wealth, merely for the Sake of keeping it, is an apparent Abſurdity. Keeping it, merely for the Repute of having it, is a very low Inducement. And if laying up againſt future Accidents be pretended, a moderate Store will ſuffice for a reaſonable Security, and nothing can ſecure us abſolutely. Indeed the larger the Fortune, the more Room for Accidents, in one Part or another of it; and the Loſs of a ſmall Part will be as grievous to a Heart ſet upon Riches, as that of a larger to another Man. Beſides, whoever lives only to the Purpoſe of ſaving and accumulating, will be tempted by this ruling Paſſion to a ſinful Neglect of the Poor and the Worthy among his Friends and Dependants, perhaps

[s] Job xxxi. 24.

among his Relations and very Children. For that important Obligation of *providing for their own, and ſpecially for thoſe of their own Houſe*, (on which St. *Paul*, in the Chapter before the Text [k], hath laid ſo great a Streſs, and which the Covetous imagine, or pretend, they are ſo faithfully performing) doth not conſiſt at all in hoarding up for them as much as they can, but in beſtowing upon them as much as they need. This not only the Context proves, and the Uſe of the original Word in other Authors, but the Nature of the Thing. For whoever is in Want of any Thing requiſite, is evidently unprovided for, how much Wealth ſoever another may ſay he keeps for him, whilſt he really keeps it from him. And when any one hath made Proviſion enough for thoſe who peculiarly belong to him, to put them in a Way ſuitable to their Condition, he can ſeldom be bound, and is not always at Liberty, to do more. The Care of them indeed is the firſt Demand upon him; yet after this is ſufficiently taken, and even while it is taking, there may be many other moſt equitable Claims; and they are all of them intitled to a proportionable Regard by that general Pre-

[k] 1 Tim. v. 8.

cept

cept of Reaſon, as well as Scripture, *Withhold not Good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the Power of thy Hand to do it*[1]. Some Occaſions preſent themſelves to every one, and frequent Occaſions to the Rich and Great, on which extending Acts of Liberality far beyond the narrow Bounds of a Family, is indeed but diſcharging a Debt; which the Participation in common of human Nature brings upon us, and he that *hath made us all of one Blood*[k] expects we ſhall pay. Nor will he fail to impute it for heinous Guilt, at the Day of Judgment; (as our Saviour hath given us awful Warning) if they whom he hath particularly qualified for Works of Charity, and expreſsly appointed the Stewards and Diſpenſers of what he hath beſtowed on them purpoſely for that very End, ſhall, in Breach of ſo ſacred a Truſt, confine to themſelves the Bounty which was placed in their Hands, that all around them might receive a proper Share of it.

But ſome of the higher Part of Mankind adventure to go ſtill greater Lengths than this, to preſerve the Poſſeſſion of what they have: detain from others, without Scruple, what even

[1] Prov. iii. 27. [k] Acts xvii. 26

in legal Juſtice they are intitled to; and defend themſelves againſt the Demand of it, on the Advantage-ground of their Wealth, or their Rank and Station; which render it often difficult and expenſive, ſometimes impoſſible for their Inferiors to obtain Redreſs. A moſt ungenerous, diſhoneſt, tyrannical Uſe of the Prerogatives of their Condition! Every one muſt ſee it to be ſo: and they, upon whom the Eyes of every one are fixed, ſhould have no little Regard to this Conſideration, amongſt others that are ſtill weightier. The Privileges granted by Law to ſome were granted for the Security of the public Good, not the Patronage of private Oppreſſion. And thoſe, which others take to themſelves, of awing or ruining, by the Superiority of their Fortune or their Credit, ſuch as preſume to think of recovering what is denied them, are contrary to the whole Intent of Law and of human Society. Not to ſay, that whoever hath a Spark of true Greatneſs, will be deſirous to put any one, with whom he hath a Controverſy, fairly on the Level for an equitable Deciſion of it, and will ſay, with *Elihu* in *Job*, *If thou canſt anſwer me, ſet thy Words in Order before me, ſtand up. Behold,*

*hold, my Terror ſhall not make thee afraid, neither ſhall my Hand be heavy upon thee*[1].

But perhaps they will plead, that the Demands, which they refuſe to ſatisfy, are unjuſt Impoſitions. And without Queſtion, if that be really and evidently ſo, they not only are warranted to ſtand out themſelves, but ought to protect others in doing it, as far as they properly can. But then, it is never allowable to make this Plea, without being ſatisfied of its Truth; and Men cannot be reaſonably ſatisfied of any Thing, concerning which they have not impartially ſought for full Information, and coolly conſidered it. They may have entertained Suſpicions, they may have heard Reports, they may have received poſitive Aſſurances, perhaps from the prejudiced, perhaps from the ignorant; but theſe Things, without knowing what the other Side hath to anſwer, are no Foundations at all to determine upon, in Matters of Property: where it ſhould ever be obſerved, as a general Rule, that though we are indeed concerned to inquire what Demands are ill grounded, and reject them; yet we are much more concerned to inquire what are well grounded, and comply with them. Our

[1] Job xxxiii. 5, 7.

Intereſt only is at Stake in one Caſe, and often a very ſmall Intereſt too; but our Honour and Conſcience in the other. For whoever preſumes, in any Matter, to ſay, he will not do what Juſtice or Equity requires he ſhould do, may in other Reſpects be a worthy Man, bnt in this he is very blameable: and were the ſame Temper to influence his whole Conduct, he would be completely wicked. Indeed, to ſay the Truth, unjuſtly withholding Things is much the ſame Crime as unjuſtly taking them away. And whoever is in Reality, as well as Name, a Man of Honour, were it ever ſo much in his Power, by his own Authority, or the Complaiſance of others, to procure himſelf unequitable Profits or Savings, without any Poſſibility of Controul; will not endeavour, will not permit, that a Preference or Favour, injurious to any one Perſon in the World, ſhall ever be ſhewn him. He will check the Baſeneſs of thoſe who would pay Court to him by ſuch vile Practices, and obviate the Fears of ſuch as apprehend they may diſpleaſe him by acting uprightly, where it makes againſt him. Far from contriving or deſiring to be eaſed at the Expence of thoſe beneath him, he will require to be put on

no

no better a Footing than other Men; and to be charged with his full Share of the Burthens of Society, ſince he receives his full Share of its Benefits. No Matter, that while he behaves thus, others, and it may be thoſe of his own Rank, will not fail to behave very differently, nor he perhaps to be a Sufferer by it. He will be content, if they pleaſe to have it ſo, that ſeeking and enjoying unfair Advantages ſhall be their Character; and refuſing and deſpiſing them, his.

But beſides the Sins, which may be committed in the getting or keeping of Wealth, there are

3. Others, committed too frequently in uſing it; which Perſons of ſuperior Fortune and Rank muſt be charged to avoid, and which undoubtedly the Text comprehends. For *putting their Truſt in Riches*, is juſt as much the Deſcription of thoſe, who place the Happineſs of Life in the Enjoyment of large Eſtates, as thoſe who place it in the Poſſeſſion of them. Nay indeed, as a very great Part of the antient Wealth conſiſted immediately in Plenty of thoſe Things, which give Pleaſure in the Conſumption of them; ſo Voluptuouſneſs, which ſurely the Apoſtle would not omit on this Occaſion,

Occaſion, was perhaps more eſpecially deſigned to be forbidden than Rapaciouſneſs, or exceſſive Parſimony. And it confirms this, that when our Saviour was cautioning his Hearers againſt *laying up Treaſure for themſelves*, inſtead of *being rich towards God*; the Parable, by which he choſe to do it, was that of a Perſon, who having, as he thought, abundant Proviſion of *good* Things *for many Years*, determined upon it from thenceforth to *take his Eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry* [n]. Now this Man is the Repreſentative of a numerous Multitude, who agree intirely in his general Scheme, though they differ from each other in ſeveral Particulars.

Some truſt in their Riches ſo very inconſiderately, that they truſt there will never be an End of them, let them be ſquandered as extravagantly as they will. So they ſet out with gratifying themſelves in every Thing, and looking after nothing; till, having been the Admiration of the Weak, and the Pity of the Wiſe for a few Years, and contribute to undo their Equals by their Example, and their Inferiors by the Honour of employing and not paying them; they are reduced from the Grandeur,

[n] Luke xii. 17—21.

which

which they ſhould not have affected, to Difficulties that they need never have known. But they will feel them now the more ſeverely for their preceding Indulgences, and yet perhaps will be tempted to plunge forward, through Meanneſs and Wickedneſs, into deeper Ruin, inſtead of retreating as ſoon as they perceived their Miſtake: which laſt if they would do, with an ingenuous Acknowledgment of it, they would deſerve to be treated with much Tenderneſs, as having erred only through Inexperience, and thoughtleſs Levity, not ill Deſign.

Others, if they do not diſſipate their Eſtates in ſo wild a Manner, yet uſe them principally to miniſter to their Senſuality and Debauchery; Vices, which Men of ſuperior Fortune ſomehow imagine they have a Sort of Right to be guilty of: and Men of ſuperior Rank behave, too many of them, as if they had no other End of their Being. Commonly they do ſo in the Beginning of Life, and, in Truth, not uncommonly to the End of it. Yet it is evident, beyond Denial, that Reaſon no more allows, and Inclination no more excuſes, theſe Things, in the higheſt of Mankind than the loweſt; and were all Mankind to practiſe them without

out Reſtraint, there would be no living in the World. Indeed there is not any Degree of vicious Practice, but hath its proportionable Degree of Miſchief, to ſome one or another, following it; eſpecially as one wrong Step leads on imperceptibly, and at laſt, (as the Guilty are apt to think) unavoidably, to many others: and thus the moſt harmleſs and beſt-natured Vices in Appearance, produce perhaps the cruelleſt Injuries. But the fatal Effects of ſenſual Indulgences and diſſolute Pleaſures on the Healths, the Fortunes, the Uſefulneſs, the Reputations, the Peace, of thoſe who give Way to them, on the Quiet and Proſperity of Families, on the good Order and Strength of Civil Society; are ſo obvious in themſelves, ſo often inſiſted on from this Place, and ſo univerſally acknowledged, (how little ſoever the Acknowledgment influences Men) that there can be no Need to inlarge on them at preſent. And were they much leſs notorious than they are; yet, ſince God hath been pleaſed to interpoſe his peremptory Commands in a Caſe where ſurely he may; and to deliver by expreſs Revelation ſuch Rules for the Government of every Appetite, as his Infinite Wiſdom ſaw to be fit; it behoves the greateſt

greateſt of thoſe, who preſume to tranſgreſs the Limits which he hath ſet them, to conſider well with themſelves what Plea they will make to him another Day for ſo doing. That Nature prompts them to it, is not always a Truth; for their Exceſſes are often a Perverſion, a Force upon Nature: and it is never a Juſtification, unleſs it be juſtifiable for Men to do every Thing to which they are inclined: when yet they ſhew perpetually, that they can, if they pleaſe, curb their ſtrongeſt Inclinations of this Sort, on Motives far leſs conſiderable than thoſe of Religion. And for the remaining Excuſe of general Cuſtom, what is wrong for one to do is wrong for more; and God will not diſpenſe with his Laws, merely becauſe a Number of his Creatures join to diſobey them: beſides that Perſons of Rank are bound, both in Honour and Duty, to ſet the Example, not to follow it blindfold. Examples of Vice they have ſet, till thoſe about them and beneath them have learned much more of it than their Superiors, I believe, wiſh they had; but they muſt wiſh in vain, till they change their own Conduct. And indeed, the Men of Condition eſpecially, have left no Room for any of themſelves to make a diſtinguiſhed

tinguiſhed Figure in Wickedneſs, without becoming abandoned to the moſt ſhocking and pernicious Degrees of it; nor hardly then. But by a virtuous Example they may be moſt honourably ſingular; for the Eſteem of Goodneſs is ſtill general, however rare the Practice be. And not only the ſober Part of Mankind, but the Bulk of the immoral, (though doubtleſs more delighted with ſuch as keep them in Countenance, and often poorly affecting to ridicule others) yet, do, and muſt, inwardly, both reſpect and envy the worthy few, who adorn exalted Rank by an uniform Regularity of Life, in the Midſt of every Temptation to the contrary.

Another very bad Uſe of Wealth, in which too many ſeem to place (if one may judge from the Vehemence with which they purſue it) no ſmall Part of their Happineſs, is that of Gaming. Whence it ariſes, that ſo ſtrange a Paſſion fixes itſelf ſo deep in the Hearts of ſuch Numbers, is hard to ſay; whether it be an abſurd Covetouſneſs, an unmeaning Fondneſs for Victory, a groundleſs Perſuaſion of ſuperior Skill, an idle Conceit of being favoured by Fortune, or a wretched Longing to get rid any how of unwelcome Thoughts and tedious Hours.

Hours. Whatever be its Origin, its Effects are moſt fatal. That all Play is at all Times, and to all Perſons, either unlawful or inexpedient, I would by no Means affirm. But that very often it is ſo, cannot be denied; and every one, who takes a Share in it, ſhould conſider ſeriouſly the Nature and Tendency of what he doth. If it inclines him to paſſionate, and perhaps profane Expreſſions; if it inwardly agitates his Mind, ſours his Temper, or waſtes his Spirits; if it tempts him to any Sort or Degree of Fraud or Unfairneſs; if it mixes him with Company dangerous or unſuitable to him; if it devours more Time than is conſiſtent with a due Attention to the Buſineſs of his Station, public or private, or to the regular Order of his Family; if it takes up any Part of the Time that ought to be ſpent in religious Recollection of his Ways, or other Improvement of his Soul at Home in Piety and Virtue; if either by its direct and immediate, or any concomitant Expences, it leads him into Difficulties and Diſtreſſes, that may lead him into Sin; if it conſumes a greater Part of his Income than Juſtice to his Creditors, the Duty of providing for thoſe who belong to him, or of liberal Charity to every proper

good

good Purpoſe allows; or if, without any other Harm, it engages his Heart, and a Fondneſs of it grows upon him; if it lowers his Character, and ſo leſſens his Ability of doing Good in the World: nay, ſuppoſing it doth him no Harm at all, yet if it doth Harm by his Means to others; if it brings the Worthleſs and the Wicked into Credit and Familiarity with their Betters; if it intices the Well-meaning by Example, or forces them by falſe Shame, into doing any Thing, which either in itſelf, or in their Circumſtances, is unlawful or unwiſe: in every one of theſe Caſes it is without Queſtion very blameable. And whoever impartially conſiders how he ſhall preſerve himſelf clear from Guilt, as to all of them, will aſſuredly find it requiſite either to abſtain from Play intirely, or to reſtrain it in every Reſpect to much narrower Bounds than moſt Men do. For the Great have, in this Matter, as well as many more, truſted to their Riches ſo indiſcreetly, and neglected other Conſiderations ſo intirely; and their Inferiors, down to the loweſt of thoſe that can call themſelves Perſons of Faſhion (and even beneath that Rank) have followed them ſo thoughtleſly and wildly, that Play is become one of the principal

cipal Sins of the preſent Age, is ſpread to a Degree that none of the former ever knew, and daily brings forth Fruits that many ſucceeding ones may have Cauſe to lament.

But ſuppoſing Wealth be neither ſpent in this, nor any of the groſs Vices mentioned before; yet if it be employed in miniſtring to a Courſe of more decent and refined Luxury, or in ſupporting ſuch a Pomp of Life as nouriſhes Vanity and Pride, or in filling ſo much Time with unprofitable Entertainment, that little Room is left in the Mind for Objects of Importance: theſe Things alſo the Rich and Great muſt be charged to amend. For though their Condition will permit Plenty and Elegance, Diverſions and Amuſements, perhaps Dignity and Grandeur; yet it will not permit their living to theſe Things, their being quite taken up with them, and loſt in them. For not only the Tranſition is too eaſy from ſeveral innocent Pleaſures to forbidden ones, and Expenſiveneſs in any Way breeds powerful Temptations, both to omit right and to do wrong Things; but ſuppoſing theſe Dangers avoided, yet a Life devoted wholly or chiefly to the Gratifications of Senſe, the Enjoyment of Greatneſs, or Indulgence of Trifles, is not the Life of a

rational Agent; leſs ſtill of a moral and religious one; but leaſt of all of a miſerable Sinner, who has ſo very much to account for, and that ſo very ſoon. And what our Account will end in, if we make it our great Buſineſs here to delight ourſelves, without looking further, St. *Paul* hath given us a ſtrong Intimation, when he ſaith, *they that live in Pleaſure are dead whilſt they live*[n]. Our Saviour too hath forewarned us at large to the ſame Purpoſe, in that awful Parable of the rich Man, who, being neither charged with Injuſtice nor Debauchery, but only deſcribed as *clothing* himſelf *in Purple and fine Linnen, faring ſumptuouſly every Day*, and receiving theſe as his *good Things*, on which he placed his Heart; did notwithſtanding after Death *lift up his Eyes in Torment*, and petitioned in vain for a Mitigation of his Sentence[o]: an undeniably juſt one upon all thoſe who *truſt in uncertain Riches*, or any Thing they can procure with them, inſtead of *the living God, who giveth us all Things richly to enjoy*. But this Part of the Text muſt be reſerved for the Subject of another Diſcourſe. I would only obſerve further at preſent, that our bleſſed Lord hath cautioned us no leſs againſt *the Cares*

[n] 1 Tim. v. 6. [o] Luke xvi. 19—31.

than

than the Pleaſures *of this Life*; and that his Reaſon to avoid *overcharging our Hearts* with either, is the moſt forcible that can be; leſt *that Day come upon you unawares*[p]. Riches and Greatneſs no one thinks can ſecure him from Death; but they can make many forget it as abſolutely as if they did think ſo; and pleaſe themſelves with the Imagination, that they have *much Good laid up for many Years*, till, when they apprehend it leaſt, *their Soul is required of them*[q]. Therefore we ſhould often call to Mind the Pſalmiſt's Admonition: *They that truſt in their Wealth, and boaſt themſelves in the Multitude of their Riches, none of them can redeem his Brother, nor give God a Ranſom for himſelf, that he ſhould live for ever, and not ſee Corruption: when he dieth, he ſhall carry nothing away; his Glory ſhall not deſcend after him. Man that is in Honour, and underſtandeth not, is like the Beaſts that periſh*[r]: like them in this World; but will wiſh in vain to be like them in the next, when all that have lived unmindful of God, *the Kings of the Earth*, (as St. *John* foretells) *and the Great and the Rich and the Mighty, ſhall hide themſelves in the*

[p] Luke xxi. 34. [q] Luke xii. 19, 20. [r] Pſ. xlix. 6, 7, 9, 17, 20.

*Dens, and in the Rocks of the Mountains; and ſhall ſay to the Mountains and the Rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the Face of him that ſitteth on the Throne, and from the Face of the Lamb: for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who ſhall be able to ſtand*[s]*?*

[s] Rev. vi. 15, 16, 17.

# SERMON IX.

1 TIM. vi. 17, 18.

*Charge them that are rich in this World, that they be not high-minded, nor truſt in uncertain Riches; but in the living God, who giveth us richly all Things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good Works; ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate.*

I Have already, in two Diſcourſes on theſe Words, explained and enforced the two Cautions, which St. *Paul* requires that the Miniſters of God's Word ſhall give to Perſons of Wealth and Rank, againſt the Sins, to which they are peculiarly liable. And now I proceed to the Duties, of which he enjoins they ſhall be peculiarly reminded.

I. The firſt is, to *truſt in the living God, who giveth us all Things richly to enjoy.*

After warning them againſt placing their Happineſs in the Pre-eminences, the Poſ-

ſeſſions or Pleaſures of this World, it was very natural to direct them where they ſhould place it: for ſomewhere we muſt. And his Precept carries the Proof of its own Fitneſs along with it. For *the living God* muſt have the greateſt Power to reward our Truſt, and he who *giveth us all Things richly to enjoy*, hath ſhewn himſelf to have the greateſt Will alſo. All that we are, and have, and can hope for, proceeds from him, and depends upon him. Since therefore he hath made us capable of knowing this; Duty, Gratitude and Intereſt, conſpire to demand, that we devote our whole Being to him; uſe what he hath beſtowed on us agreeably to the Rules, which he hath preſcribed, and for the Attainment of the Ends, which he had in View; nor ever be ſo abſurdly attentive to his Gifts, as to forget the Giver: whoſe Bounty, the more largely we taſte of it, ought ſurely to inſpire the warmer Love. And therefore the Rich and Great, on whom Providence hath conferred ſo many diſtinguiſhed Benefits and Privileges, (of the Value of which they ſeem in general highly ſenſible) are bound, beyond others, to a moſt affectionate Piety in return: and yet, is it not on the whole viſibly true, that theſe of all others

expreſs

expreſs the leaſt Piety in the whole Compaſs of their Behaviour.

Too many of them ſcorn to obſerve or acknowledge any Rule of Conduct at all, unleſs it be Faſhion, worldly Advantage or Pleaſure. A great Part of thoſe who will own, and occaſionally ſeem zealous for the Obligations of Virtue, or however of ſome Virtues, manifeſt very little Senſe, if any, of the Duties of Religion. Some have never had the Condeſcenſion, or imagine they never had the Leiſure, once to think of it: others have heard Objections againſt it, or at leaſt have heard there are ſuch; which, to prove themſelves no Bigots, they reſolve to believe are unanſwerable, without further Inquiry. And not a few, who are fully perſuaded, after a Sort, both of the Greatneſs and the Goodneſs of God, ſtill are as abſolutely negligent of him, as if no Regard whatever were due to him for either. Yet, if we are to reverence Authority, and love Mercy, and believe in Veracity, and be ſorry for Offences, amongſt Men; why are not all theſe Things unſpeakably more neceſſary in relation to our Creator? Some Perſons, it may be, when they are preſſed upon the Subject, will plead, that they are by no Means without

inward Regard to God; though they cannot ſay, they give much outward Demonſtration of it, in Acts of Worſhip. But how real, how deep, how practical, this Regard is, they would do well to aſk their Hearts very carefully: for he that ſees their Hearts knows with Certainty; they that ſee only their Lives, can form a ſtrong Preſumption: and no one will ever be a Gainer, by attempting to deceive either God, or Man, or himſelf.

But ſuppoſing them ſincere, what Reaſon can there be, why Reſpect to God ſhould not be paid outwardly, when Reſpect to every Superior beſides is? For ſurely his knowing we have it, is no ſufficient Reaſon for omitting to expreſs it: ſince viſible and ſtated Acts of Homage to him appear notwithſtanding, both from Reaſon and Experience, highly requiſite, to preſerve and ſtrengthen a Senſe of Religion in our own Minds, and to ſpread it in the World. Or could we have doubted of this otherwiſe; yet, when he hath expreſsly required himſelf to be worſhipped, both in public and in private, what Pretence have we to a Shadow of Piety, if we either diſobey or think meanly of that Command? And they among the Great, who neglect to honour God, diſcern

very clearly the Neceſſity, not only of their Inferiors paying Honour to them, but of their paying Honour to Perſons that are a little above them: and would think the Excuſes extremely frivolous in their own Caſes, which they are determined, ſhall be good and valid in his. What can this Inconſiſtence mean? Surely they do not think it beneath them, to *fall down and kneel before the Lord their Maker*[a], while they can bow ſo very low to a Fellow-Creature, perhaps a worthleſs one. And yet really, the Manner, in which they ſometimes ſpeak of Religion, looks a good deal this Way. I mean, when they own its Importance to keep the Vulgar in order, and their Obligation to attend on its Exerciſes conſcientiouſly, for that Purpoſe; but intimate, that ſome how or other they themſelves are exempted. Now the Difference in the Eyes of God, between the higheſt and loweſt of Men, is as nothing: and if any Part of the World hath Need to be reſtrained by the Ties of religious Duty; the upper Part, being the leaſt ſubject to other Reſtraints, hath the greateſt Need: nor can it be more their Intereſt, that the reſt of Mankind ſhould have a Senſe of Piety kept up amongſt them;

[a] Pſ. xcv. 6.

than

than it is the Intereſt of the reſt of Mankind, that the Great ſhould. But if this were otherwiſe, they may depend upon it, that if they will ſlight Religion; ſuch as ſee them do ſo, will not be influenced by them to reſpect it. And therefore all the Choice they have is, either to ſhew ſome Regard to its Precepts themſelves; or to be content, that their Families, their Dependants, and the World about them, ſhall have none. This latter is the Reſolution, that many ſeem to have taken: what will follow from it, hath been already felt too much; and if they go on, will be felt continually more. But God grant, they may rather ſee, before it be too late, both the Wickedneſs and the Folly of throwing off that Reverence, which is ſo juſtly due to him, whoſe Laws are, every one of them, Proviſions for our temporal Happineſs in this World, as well as our eternal Felicity in the next. Men of Rank and Fortune, have a much greater Concern in the Welfare of Society, than others; and therefore are more bound in Point of Prudence to ſupport Religion: they have a much greater Ability of doing it, and are particularly intruſted with it, and therefore are more bound in Point of Conſcience. But what completes their Obligation,

tion, in both Reſpects, is, that if they neglect it, the Endeavours of others will, humanly ſpeaking, be all in vain. There may be ſome Hope, even for a wicked Nation, while the Fear of God remains in any conſiderable Number of the wealthy and ruling Part of it: but when they once come to be throughly corrupted; then every Thing is ripe for Ruin. And therefore the Prophet *Jeremiah*, after complaining very pathetically, of the Sinfulneſs and Impiety of the Bulk of his Countrymen, ſtill thought there was one Reſource left. But when he found, that thoſe of high Condition were as bad or worſe, than the reſt; he immediately gives up all, and pronounces their Deſtruction. *I ſaid*, (ſpeaking of the common People) *Theſe are poor, they are fooliſh; they know not the Way of the Lord, and the Judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great Men, and will ſpeak unto them: for they have known the Way of the Lord, and the Judgment of their God. But, theſe have altogether broken the Yoke, and burſt the Bonds. Wherefore a Lion out of the Foreſts ſhall tear them, and a Wolf of the Evening ſhall ſpoil them; a Leopard ſhall watch over their Cities;—becauſe their Tranſgreſſions are many, and their Backſlidings are increaſed* [b].

[b] Jer. v. 4—6.

But

But it is poſſible for us to keep up a ſufficient Profeſſion of Religion, to ſecure both public Order and domeſtic Tranquillity; yet by no Means have a ſufficient Senſe of it, for obtaining eternal Life: and what will the former avail us without the latter? It is not a merely prudential and political Piety; it is not one, that will only form our Behaviour into an outward Regularity, or affect our Hearts tranſiently now and then, that will ſtand us in Stead hereafter: it muſt be a fixed inward Principle, that moves us effectually to look beyond every Thing in this World, to God the Fountain of all Good: and to take him for *our Hope and our Portion in the Land of the Living*[c]. He offers himſelf for ſuch, and ſurely we ought to accept the Offer. He is able to make us happy, and nothing elſe is: whatever earthly Good we have moſt Pleaſure in, quickly fails: or if it did not, in a few Years Life itſelf will fail: and *what is our Hope, when God taketh away our Soul*[d]? In that awful Hour, if we have not him to truſt in, we ſhall have nothing; and the Foundation muſt be laid now, if we would build upon it then. But Honours, Riches, and Pleaſures unaccountably turn away

[c] Pſ. cxlii. 6. [d] Job xxvii. 8.

Mens

Mens Attention from these obvious Truths; and present them with such Temptations, to trust in themselves and the external Advantages of their Condition, for all the Happiness they need; that they cannot be admonished too often, to *trust* only *in the living God*; and that, only in such a Manner, as he hath declared they safely may.

Some have a bold and irreverent Confidence, that all is well with them in Respect to the divine Favour, on no other Ground than that they are guilty of only such Faults, as the Generality of the World are: as if God would not dare to punish a Majority; and Men might be as wicked as they would, provided there were but enough of them so. But over and above this, Persons of Rank seem extremely apt to think, that they shall be treated with peculiar Indulgence: whereas indeed, since *much hath been given them, much will be required of them*[e]; and in Comparison, *Mercy will soon pardon the Meanest, but the Mighty shall be mightily tormented*[f]. Others acknowledge the Necessity of a virtuous Life for all Men, but indulgently presume their own to have been so, which in Strictness hath been far otherwise; and then *trusting in themselves that they are righteous*[g],

[e] Luke xii. 48. [f] Wisd. vi. 6. [g] Luke xviii. 9.

imagine

imagine God their Debtor. Or if they do confeſs they have been faulty; Repentance and Amendment, (which they apprehend to be ſufficiently in their own Power at any Time) they conceive, immediately blots out all, and gives them a Claim of Right to Pardon and Reward. Now on the contrary, Reaſon itſelf ſhews, that Forgiveneſs is an Act of mere voluntary Mercy: and that nothing is due from Juſtice, even to a Creature perfectly obedient, but that his Being be not made, on the whole, worſe than not being. To this, Experience adds, that our beſt Obedience is very imperfect: and agreeably to both, the Goſpel teaches, that by *the Deeds of the Law ſhall no Fleſh be juſtified*; *for all have ſinned, and come ſhort of the Glory of God*: that *we are juſtified freely by his Grace, through the Redemption that is in Jeſus Chriſt, whom God hath ſet forth to be a Propitiation, through Faith in his Blood*; *that he might be juſt, and the Juſtifier of him which believeth in Jeſus* [h]. It teaches alſo, that *we are not ſufficient of ourſelves, even to think any Thing*; *but our Sufficiency is of God* [i]. That *by his Grace we are what we are*; and when we perform good Works, it is *not we, but the Grace of God*

[h] Rom. iii. 20—26. [i] 2 Cor. iii. 5.

*which*

*which is with us*[k]; and proceeds from his *holy Spirit*, whom *he will give to them that aſk him*[l].

A Doctrine, which ſo entirely *excludes boaſting*[m], muſt be very diſagreeable to human Pride in general: but eſpecially mortifying to thoſe, whom the Flattery of the World, and of their own Hearts, hath accuſtomed to conſider themſelves in a Light, extremely different from that of miſerable Sinners. For this Reaſon, amongſt others, in the early Ages *not many mighty, not many noble, were called*[n] effectually: and down to the preſent, worldly Greatneſs hath ever been a powerful Obſtacle to Chriſtian Humility, in Faith, as well as Practice. What our Saviour ſaid to the Jews: *How can ye believe, which receive Honour one of another, and ſeek not the Honour, which cometh from God only*[o], holds but too true concerning the upper Part of thoſe who call themſelves his Diſciples. They therefore ſhould apply with peculiar Care, to become ſuch indeed; by looking into their own Breaſts, and conſidering well their Need of the divine Mercy; *caſting down Imaginations, and every high Thing, that exalteth itſelf againſt the Knowledge of God; and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Chriſt*[p]. Truſting

[k] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [l] Luke xi. 13. [m] Rom. iii. 27.
[n] 1 Cor. i. 26. [o] John v. 44. [p] 2 Cor. x. 5.

in

in ourſelves, can afford us only a falſe Peace for a Time, which will ruin us at laſt: *but whoſo putteth his Truſt in the Lord, Mercy embraceth him on every Side* [q]. He hath a Covenant-right to Pardon and Comfort, Aſſiſtance in all Good, Protection from all Evil, and everlaſting Life to crown the whole.

But then to make his Title ſure, he muſt exert his Truſt in all Circumſtances, *and walk by Faith, not by Sight* [r]. Even good Perſons are ſtrangely apt to lay much too great a Streſs on worldly Advantages. Hence it is, that they deſire them ſo earneſtly, and delight in them ſo highly; without conſidering, that God and a good Conſcience, can make us far happier without them, than others are with them. Were we but convinced of this, we ſhould feel, with what Juſtice the Pſalmiſt pours Contempt on the vehement Purſuers of what this Earth hath to give. *There be many that ſay, who will ſhew us any Good? but, Lord lift thou up the Light of thy Countenance upon us. Thou haſt put Gladneſs in my Heart, more than in the Time, that their Corn and their Wine increaſed. I will lay me down in Peace; and take my Reſt: for it is thou, Lord, only, that makeſt me dwell in Safety* [s].

[q] Pſ. xxxii. 10. [r] 2 Cor. v. 7. [s] Pſ. iv. 6—9.

For

For Want of reflecting on whom we depend, we are apt to be elated *in our Proſperity, and ſay, we ſhall never be moved*; when indeed it is *the Lord of his Goodneſs that hath made our Hill ſo ſtrong:* and the Moment he *turns his Face from us, we ſhall be troubled*[t]. From the ſame Cauſe we are apt to be dejected when Afflictions befall us, or Dangers threaten us; forgetting, that though *great and many are the Troubles of the Righteous, the Lord delivereth him out of them all*[u] in this World, if it be expedient for him; if not, he ſhall be ſupported under them, and they ſhall increaſe his Reward in the next. But the Wicked *God ſhall deſtroy for ever, and root them out of the Land of the Living: the Righteous alſo ſhall ſee it and fear, and ſay*, with awful Approbation of the Divine Juſtice, *Lo, this is the Man that took not God for his Strength, but truſted unto the Multitude of his Riches, and ſtrengthened himſelf in his Wickedneſs*[w].

We ſhould all therefore learn to live more to our Maker; to imprint on our Hearts, and exert in our whole Behaviour, a ſtronger Senſe of his preſent Providence, and future Rewards. It would be a Direction, a Security, an Im-

[t] Pſ. xxx. 6, 7. [u] Pſ. xxxiv. 19. [w] Pſ. lii. 6, 7, 8.

provement, a Comfort to us, beyond Expreſſion. But eſpecially they, who have the greateſt Number of intereſting and pleaſing Objects in this World to fix their Thoughts upon; they, who may ſeem to have the leaſt Need of looking further, have indeed the greateſt, to be frequently charged, as the Jews were by *Moſes*; *Beware leſt when thou haſt eaten and art full, and haſt built goodly Houſes and dwelt therein; and when thy Silver and thy Gold is increaſed, and all thou haſt is multiplied, then thine Heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God*[x]. Now if thoſe Perſons forget him, who have the moſt Reaſon to remember him thankfully, it is double Guilt, and indeed proportionable Folly. For what can be more obvious, than that conſidering all our good Things, as the Marks of his Kindneſs to us, muſt unſpeakably inhance their Value; nor can it lay us under any other than beneficial Reſtraints in the Uſe of them. Then beſides, how naturally doth this Conſideration lead us forward to the yet more delightful one, of that ſweet Security, in which we may live here under the Superintendency of ſo gracious a Being; and of thoſe infinitely better Things, which he hath yet in

[x] Deut. viii. 11—14.

Store

Store for us hereafter. *This God is our God for ever and ever. He ſhall be our Guide unto Death*[y]. *Thou ſhalt guide me with thy Counſel, and after that receive me with Glory. Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon Earth, that I deſire in Compariſon of thee. My Fleſh and my Heart faileth, but God is the Strength of my Heart and my Portion for ever*[z]. There is nothing enthuſiaſtic, nothing extravagant, in ſuch Reflections and Feelings as theſe, when they are grounded on good Evidence of our Title to God's Favour; and in that Caſe we cannot act a more pious or more rational Part, than to indulge and enjoy them. Only we muſt not dwell upon Contemplation ſo as to forget Action; but, as the Pſalmiſt directs, *Truſt in the Lord, and be doing Good*[a]. Agreeably to which Rule,

2. The ſecond Duty preſcribed in the Text, as peculiarly neceſſary for the Rich and Great, is, *that they do Good, that they be rich in good Works.* Extenſive and important as this Duty is, its Nature is ſo well underſtood, and the Motives for practiſing it ſo obvious, as to make it unneceſſary for me to enlarge particularly upon

[y] Pſ. xlviii. 14. [z] Pſ. lxxiii. 23, 24, 25. [a] Pſ. xxxvii. 3.

it. And indeed, if Men of Rank and Fortune obſerve duly the preceding Part of the Apoſtle's Charge, they will eaſily be induced to obſerve the concluding one. If they are neither ſo *high-minded* as to neglect and deſpiſe their Fellow-creatures; nor ſo ſelfiſh as to *truſt in uncertain Riches*, in the Acquiſition, the Poſſeſſion, or voluptuous Enjoyment of them, for their Happineſs, but expect it only from their Acceptance with the *living God*; they will naturally imitate him whom they deſire to pleaſe, particularly in his Beneficence, the moſt amiable of all his Perfections. And it is not by their Wealth only that they are able, and therefore called to do Good, but by their whole Behaviour, by the Example of their Piety and Juſtice, their Abſtinence from criminal and imprudent Pleaſures; by an active, yet mild, public Spirit, and an honourable Diſintereſtedneſs in private Life, united with a decent Frugality; by Attention to the Intereſts, preſent and future, of their Families, their Friends and Dependants; conducted in ſuch Manner, as always to be conſiſtent with a general Care, to encourage and recommend worthy Perſons and Actions, and treat the unworthy with the Diſapprobation and Contempt

tempt which they deſerve. Theſe are Methods, by which thoſe of Rank and Influence may do much greater Service to Mankind than large Liberalities would do; and by a contrary Behaviour, in any one of the above-mentioned Inſtances, they may eaſily be Authors of more Miſchief than their whole Eſtates would compenſate for. Now the Apoſtle hath determined, that *though they beſtow all their Goods to feed the Poor*, yet if they *have not* the *Charity* to act in other Reſpects as they ought, *it will profit them nothing* [b].

But ſtill, though Almſgiving is by no Means the whole of Beneficence, yet it is an eſſential Part in thoſe whom God hath qualified for it. And he hath *given them all Things richly* and in Plenty, not merely for themſelves *to enjoy*, in the vulgar Senſe, but that others may enjoy a due Share of them, and they the Pleaſure of imparting it; the worthieſt and higheſt Enjoyment of Wealth that can be. This therefore is the Purpoſe for which we ſhould remember we are intruſted with it, and be bountiful in Proportion to the Truſt; for to with-hold but Part of what is due, knowingly, is the ſame Kind, though not the ſame Degree

[b] 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

of Unfaithfulneſs, as to with-hold the whole. Indeed how much exactly is due, God hath no where determined; nor could there, in the Midſt of ſo great a Variety of Circumſtances, have been given particular Rules, fitted to every Caſe: nor hath any pious Mind, that endeavours to judge and act as rightly as it can, the leaſt Reaſon to be anxious for Want of a more preciſe Knowledge, where it is not to be had. But, in general, that both our Charity and our Generoſity ſhould bear ſome decent and liberal Proportion to our Abilities, and the *Rich in this World be rich in good Works* alſo, not only the Text enjoins, but common Reaſon dictates; and if we are deficient, the *poor Widow*, with her *two Mites*[s], will far outdo us in that very Virtue, by the Practice of which our Maker juſtly expects we ſhould appear diſtinguiſhed.

Nor is it ſufficient for the Rich to give plentifully, but they muſt do it, on every fit Occaſion, ſpeedily; *be ready to diſtribute*, and not ſtay till the Circumſtances of the Poor are beyond Recovery, or their Spirits broken under the Weight of their Misfortunes, but make Haſte to help them, and, as far as poſſible, pre-

[s] Mark xii. 42.

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vent Diſtreſs. *Say not unto thy Neighbour, Go and come again, and To-morrow I will give, when thou haſt it by thee* [d], *and delay not to ſhew him Mercy* [e]. Nor is it enough to be outwardly expeditious, but we muſt be inwardly *willing to communicate*; not part with our Benefactions *grudgingly and of Neceſſity*, as obeying the Divine Command merely becauſe we dare not diſobey it; *for God loveth a chearful Giver* [f]. To the Poor indeed it is all one from what Principle we give, but to us the Difference is infinite. In the Heart lies all the Value. Ever ſo little will be accepted of Heaven, if it proceed from a Mind that would gladly have done more; and ever ſo much will be deſpiſed, if we ſecretly wiſh we could have ſaved it. St. *Paul*'s Exhortation therefore is of unſpeakable Importance: *He that ſheweth Mercy, let him do it with Chearfulneſs* [g]. And indeed, what can we have more Cauſe to rejoice in doing? It is very comfortable to think that we are able; it is delightful to think, that by our Means the Miſeries of God's Creation are leſſened; it is no ſmall Satisfaction to be loved and bleſſed in this World, but it is the greateſt poſſible

[d] Prov. iii. 28. [e] Ecclus xxix. 8. [f] 2 Cor. ix. 7. [g] Rom. xii. 8.

*to lay up in Store for ourſelves a good Foundation againſt* the next, *that we may lay hold on eternal Life* [h], and have it ſaid to us by our Judge at the laſt Day, *Well done, good and faithful Servant; thou haſt been faithful over a few Things, I will make thee Ruler over many Things: enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord* [i].

[h] 1 Tim. vi. 19. [i] Matth. xxv. 21.

# SERMON X.

MATTH. xi. 5.

*—And the Poor have the Goſpel preached to them.*

THESE Words are Part of our Saviour's Anſwer to the Diſciples of *John* the Baptiſt, who came to inquire, whether Jeſus were himſelf the Meſſiah, or only a Prophet commiſſioned to foretell his Coming. For it appears from the firſt Chapter of St. *John*'s Goſpel, that many of the Jews expected, beſides *Elias*, another Prophet to procede or accompany their great Deliverer; miſtaking perhaps the Prophet deſcribed, *Deut.* xviii. for an Attendant of the Meſſiah, inſtead of the Meſſiah himſelf, whom they were apt to conſider only in the Character of a King. And as Jeſus had now manifeſted himſelf ſome Time to the World, without taking this Character

upon him, it was natural enough for *John*'s Diſciples to imagine, that perhaps he came in the other only. *John* himſelf indeed knew, and probably had told them the contrary; but finding them ſtill deſirous of a further Satisfaction, was extremely willing they ſhould have it: and to make the Inquiry as eaſy to them as poſſible, directs them to propoſe the Queſtion, not in their own Name, but in his. On their doing it, Jeſus performs in their Sight a conſiderable Number of his uſual beneficent Miracles, joined, as it ſhould ſeem, with ſuitable Inſtructions; and then, without declaring himſelf expreſsly, (which he choſe, for wiſe and kind Reaſons, to avoid before the Multitude) diſmiſſes them with an Anſwer, taken, the greateſt Part of it, out of the Words of *Iſaiah*; in which he had foretold, that the Meſſiah ſhould perform juſt ſuch Miracles, and give juſt ſuch Inſtructions. For we read, that *in that ſame Hour he cured many of their Infirmities and Plagues, and unto many that were blind he gave Sight*[a]. *Then he anſwered and ſaid unto them, Go and ſhew John again thoſe Things, which ye do hear and ſee. The Blind receive their Sight, and the Lame walk; the Lepers are cleanſed,*

[a] Luke vii. 21.

*and*

*and the Deaf hear; the Dead are raiſed up, and the Poor have the Goſpel preached to them.*

The Prediction, of his applying himſelf peculiarly to inſtruct the lower Part of the World, it is probable, he purpoſely reſerved to the laſt Place; becauſe his doing it, (beſides its being the Completion of a Prophecy) was, though not a Miracle, as the reſt were, yet a ſingular Proof, both of the Humanity of his Temper and Doctrine, and of his Diſintereſtedneſs too. For this Method was incapable of doing him Service, and in Fact did him no ſmall Prejudice with thoſe, who had the Power of that Nation in their Hands. The Jewiſh Teachers and Rulers, who were the ſame, kept the common Sort at a very great Diſtance; and on that, amongſt other Accounts, were highly reverenced by them. The Familiarities therefore, to which Jeſus condeſcended, immediately ſet all theſe againſt him; and furniſhed them with an Opportunity of repreſenting him and his Diſciples as equally contemptible. Thus, when their own Officers, (whom it ſeems his Diſcourſes had ſtruck as powerfully as they did the reſt of the Multitude) could not help applauding him before their Faces, *Never Man ſpake like this Man*; their Anſwer is, *Have any*

*of*

*of the Rulers, or the Pharisees, believed on him? This People, which knoweth not the Law, are cursed* [b]. But indeed the humble and unbiassed Minds of the Illiterate are much better Judges of Truth, when proposed to them, than such as are blinded with learned Prejudice, worldly Interest, or sensual Pleasures. To the former therefore principally our Saviour vouchsafed his Instructions, grieving to see them *scattered abroad, as Sheep having no Shepherd* [c]; and they, receiving his Doctrine into *honest and good Hearts* [d], became in great Numbers his Followers: and at first were almost the only ones he had. For St. *Luke* tells us, *he lifted up his Eyes on his Disciples and said, Blessed be ye Poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God* [e]. The Gospel indeed makes all blessed who receive it, both by its useful Precepts, and its gracious Promises; yet the Poor especially, as they have most Need of those Directions and Supports in this Life, and Assurances of Happiness in the next, which it communicates. But then, to receive them, they must be not only poor, but his Disciples. It is not being in a low Condition, but being virtuous and pious

[b] John vii. 45—49. [c] Matth. ix. 36. [d] Luke viii. 15. [e] Luke vi. 20.

in

in that Condition, that intitles Perſons to God's Favour, as it is not being wealthy and great, but making an ill Uſe of Wealth and Greatneſs, that provokes his Diſpleaſure. So that the Happieſt or the Wretchedeſt here, may, according as they behave, be infinitely more happy or wretched hereafter. Our Saviour therefore, we find, in St. *Matthew*, expreſſes himſelf thus: *Bleſſed are the poor in Spirit*[f], they, whoſe Diſpoſitions are ſuited to their mean Circumſtances, reaſonable and reſigned, lowly and ſubmiſſive.

Preaching the Goſpel to the Poor comprehends therefore, of Neceſſity, inſtructing them in the Duties, as well as the Comforts, belonging to their State. And as our Lord and Maſter did both, ſo ſhould his Miniſters. The Duties of the Rich and Great I have lately recounted, and preſſed upon them, very freely, from this Place. And now, I hope, you, that are the inferior Part of the World, will patiently bear, in your Turn, the ſame well-meaning Plainneſs of Speech that your Betters have born; and make the proper Uſe of it, as God grant them to do. Under the general Term, *Poor*, is contained a conſiderable

[f] Matth. v. 3.

Variety

Variety of Degrees; each therefore ſhould apply peculiarly to themſelves the Precepts that peculiarly belong to them, and take no Offence at the reſt. Of ſuch as are common to all, they may all reap the Benefit; and the Higheſt may receive ſome Admonition from what is ſaid to the Loweſt; as it will contribute to regulate, not only their Way of thinking and behaving to their Inferiors, but their Temper and Conduct in other Reſpects. For to be *poor in Spirit*, a very different Thing from Mean-ſpiritedneſs, is incumbent on the Wealthieſt and the Nobleſt.

1. The firſt Duty to be enjoined you, is, Contentedneſs in your Poverty. A hard Saying, you will be apt to think, when ſcarce any one is contented in the Midſt of Riches and Honours. But the Diſcontent of ſuch, you will own, is without Reaſon. And if it can at all ariſe from mere Humour, without any Thing in Fact to juſtify it, poſſibly yours may be unjuſtifiable too. In order to try then, whether it be or not, let us conſider what Ground for Complaint you can alledge.

That ſome ſhould have greater Plenty than others, is no more a Hardſhip, than that ſome ſhould have better Health or Underſtandings,

or

or longer Lives. If there could be a Claim of Right to any of theſe Things, all Men would have an equal Claim; but as they are intirely the free Gifts of God, he may certainly give them in what Proportion he pleaſes. He hath made ſome Orders of Beings, as we ſee with our Eyes, much lower than the loweſt of Men; he hath made others, as we are taught in Scripture, much higher than the higheſt of Men: and doubtleſs he could have made them unſpeakably higher than they are. If then any Part of the Creation may complain of mere Inferiority, every Part may complain without End. If any Part may complain merely becauſe it ſuffers ſomething, no Part, that we are acquainted with, is exempt from all Suffering. And amongſt other Evils, why may not God permit ſome to feel Poverty?

Indeed, without perpetual Miracles, how can it be prevented? For ſuppoſing Equality of Circumſtances were to be eſtabliſhed at this very Time, it could never ſubſiſt. One Perſon would be induſtrious and prudent, and mend his Affairs; another, negligent or injudicious, and ruin them. Now that each ſhould poſſeſs for his own, what his own Care and Labour hath acquired, is no more than ſtrict

Juſtice;

Juſtice; that what each dies poſſeſſed of, ſhould deſcend to his own Children and Relations, preferably to others, is ſurely but reaſonable. And yet from hence will of courſe follow, by Degrees, all the Wealth, and all the Poverty, that we now ſee.

The firſt Chriſtians indeed at *Jeruſalem* had all their Poſſeſſions in common[g]; but this neither appears to have been their Practice any where elſe, nor to have laſted there, nor to have been deſigned to laſt, nor to have been more than a voluntary Agreement. For St. *Peter* tells *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, that they needed not, unleſs they pleaſed, either to have ſold their Land, or put any of the Purchaſe-money into the common Stock; but that pretending they had put it in all, (which intitled them to a Maintenance) when indeed they had ſecreted a Part, and how large a Part we know not, was an impious Fraud[h]. Community of Goods therefore was no Command then; and very ſoon after we find, in the New Teſtament, the Diſtinction of Rich and Poor eſtabliſhed and allowed every where amongſt Believers. Nor can the deſtroying of it be attempted, without the moſt dreadful Injuſtice, Confuſions,

[g] Acts ii. 44, 45. iv. 34, 35.

[h] Acts v. 1—4.

and

and Miſchiefs in human Society; nor could the Attempt ſucceed. And even ſuppoſing every one were to agree in the Scheme, who can ſay what would follow upon it? In all Likelihood, ſo univerſal a Neglect of Induſtry, that but few of the preſent Conveniencies of Life would be provided; and perhaps Mankind in general would be more deſtitute than moſt of the Poor are now.

If then there muſt be high and low in the World, why is it harder that you ſhould be of the latter Sort than that others ſhould? Were they in your Place, ought not they to be content? And if ſo, why ought not you now? It may be, notwithſtanding the different Appearances you make, the Difference of your Happineſs is very ſmall; or poſſibly you have the moſt. The Pleaſures, for which you envy the Great, are uſually very taſteleſs to them; and would be ſo to you very ſoon, if you were in their Place. Then, amidſt all that they ſeem to enjoy, you little know what many of them ſuffer, and how much of it they ſuffer from being in the Station they are. You will ſay indeed, that the Inconveniencies you feel you cannot avoid; whereas, if they feel any, it is their own Fault. But, in Truth, there are

Diſquiets, belonging to their Rank, from which yours is exempt. Or allowing it to be their own Fault, what follows? Why, that your Sufferings proceeding from God's Providence, if you behave well under them, you will be rewarded for them; and theirs, proceeding from their own wrong Conduct, without Repentance they will be puniſhed for them over and above. And who can tell, but were you in the ſame Situation, you might fall into the ſame Faults? Power and Rank and Leiſure and Plenty may indeed be uſed to excellent Purpoſes; but prove commonly, in Fact, ſuch ſtrong Temptations to the worſt of Sins, that a Station leſs expoſed to Danger, and which obliges you in ſeveral Reſpects to behave only as all Perſons ought to behave, may be the greateſt worldly Bleſſing you could have had; even though it were accompanied with much more grievous outward Diſadvantages than it is. But indeed ſome of thoſe Diſadvantages conſiſt in mere Opinion and Fancy. You are miſerable, becauſe you think yourſelf poor; at the ſame Time there are thoſe, who, if they were but in your Condition, would be happy, for they would think themſelves rich. And the very Perſons, whom you envy, becauſe they

are

are above you, it may be are pitying themſelves all the while, becauſe others are above them. This, you ſee, is only Fancy and Folly on both Sides.

But as to more real Inconveniencies. Juſt in the ſame Manner, that Cuſtom makes a Life of Pleaſure inſipid to the Great; it makes a Life of Labour and Hardſhip tolerable and comfortable to their Inferiors; unleſs they ſet their own Minds to make it otherwiſe. Indeed when Perſons are reduced, from Eaſe and Affluence, to take Pains and feel Straits; this is a Burden much heavier. But even then, Reaſon and Time, and eſpecially Religion, will teach you to ſupport it very well. If it proceed from your own Fault; you have little Cauſe to repine, and an uſeful Admonition to learn more Wiſdom. If from God's Diſpoſal of Things, his Juſtice and Goodneſs will, ſooner or later, amply recompenſe you for it; and all his Servants will have Compaſſion on you, and help you, in the mean while. The Exhortation therefore is very reaſonable: *Fear not, my Son, that we are made poor; for thou haſt much Wealth, if thou fear God, and depart from all Sin, and do that which is pleaſing in his Sight*[1].

[1] Tob. iv. 21.

*Whatever is brought upon thee take cheerfully, and be patient, when thou art changed to a low Eſtate* [k]. But ſuch as are born to that Eſtate, may, for the moſt Part, be very happy in it, if they will. And ſo many of them are viſibly fully as happy as the reſt of the World; that the Defect muſt lie in their Temper, not their Circumſtances, if others are unhappy. When indeed any uncommon Difficulties befall them: when they have numerous Families, and perhaps little Employment; or when old Age diſables them from working; or Sickneſs calls for Relief, which they have not the Means of procuring; then their Caſe is very grievous; and all, who know it, ſhould be tenderly affected, and aſſiſt them plentifully. But even at ſuch Times of Diſtreſs, they ſhould recollect, that their Superiors are by no Means intirely free from the ſame Uneaſineſſes. Perſons of conſiderable Rank often find it hard enough to bring up and provide for a Number of Children decently: and when Infirmities and Diſeaſes attack the Wealthieſt, though they may have better Advice and Accommodations than others, yet theſe Things are not able to lighten the Burthen near ſo much, as they that want

[k] Ecclus ii. 4.

them

them imagine. And whoever hath Health; which the common People that live regularly, have the moſt of; and a good Conſcience, which all may have that will; ſeldom needs to be miſerable on Account of his Circumſtances. *Health*, ſaith the wiſe Son of *Sirach*, is *above all Gold: and a ſtrong Body above infinite Wealth. There is no Riches above a ſound Body: and no Joy above the Joy of the Heart* [1].

Theſe Comforts therefore you ſhould value as they deſerve: you ſhould reflect alſo, that of every natural Gratification, which God hath provided for Man, (and all the artificial ones are trifling in Compariſon) he hath provided you a good Share. You can behold the Light of the Sun, breathe the Freſhneſs of the Air, enjoy the Beauties of the Seaſons, reliſh your Food, and be refreſhed by your Sleep, as well as the greateſt Monarchs on Earth. The higher and ſocial Pleaſures too, of kind Affections, real Friendſhips, frank and chearful Converſations, are as much within your Reach, as they can be within any one's, if not more. And if your Rank be not an honourable, it is however a neceſſary one: and proper Care, to do the Buſineſs of it ſkilfully and diligently,

[1] Eccluſ xxx. 15, 16.

will and muſt, and you cannot but be ſenſible does, make you regarded and ſought after by your Betters. On the whole therefore, even the Poor have ſufficient Cauſe, not only to be content, but thankful to Heaven, for its Goodneſs to them.

Still the Straits and Hardſhips of ſome of them, though God's Help makes the worſt ſupportable, may leave them ſmall Reaſon to be fond of Life. But ſo may the Pains and Sorrows of the Wealthieſt. And even this Situation affords you one Advantage, that you will have leſs Inducement to regret the Approach of Death; may detach your Affections without Reluctance from a World, the Enjoyments of which are ſadly embittered to others by the Thoughts of leaving it; and comfort yourſelves with the Proſpect of going to that Place, *where the Weary be at reſt, and the Servant is free from his Maſter*[m]. *O Death, how bitter is the Remembrance of thee to a Man that liveth at Reſt in his Poſſeſſions, that hath Proſperity in all Things! But acceptable is thy Sentence to the Needy, and to him that is vexed with all Things*[n]. Yet were Deliverance from preſent Evils by future endleſs Inſenſibility the Thing hoped

[m] Job iii. 17, 19. [n] Ecclus xli. 1, 2.

for,

for, this would be a melancholy Relief. But Religion ſets before us an infinitely brighter View of Things: aſſuring us, that *God hath choſen the Poor of this World, rich in Faith, and Heirs of the Kingdom, which he hath promiſed to them that love him*[o]. Here then is the ſtrong Conſolation, that on however bad a Footing any may be, in their temporal Concerns, we are all on a Level, as to our eternal Intereſts: or, if there be any Difference, 'tis in Favour of the ſuffering Part of Mankind. *Bleſſed are they that mourn: for they ſhall be comforted*[p].

But, admitting that there is by no Means any Ground to complain of God, the Poor will alledge however, that they have Reaſon frequently to complain of their Fellow-creatures, the Rich and Great, for ſhewing ſo little Regard to them in their Neceſſities. And far from denying this, it is our Duty, who are Miniſters of the Goſpel, to plead it for them, and excite others to abound more and more in tender Compaſſion and Liberality towards them.

But then, whilſt we endeavour, on all Occaſions, that due Care may be taken of you who are Poor; we muſt remind you, not to be in-

[o] James ii. 5. [p] Matth. v. 4.

ſenſible of what is done, nor to require more than is reaſonable. And here, in the firſt Place, all the common People of this Nation ought to eſteem it an unſpeakable Bleſſing, that they live in a Land of Laws and Liberty; where the Meaneſt is protected from the Oppreſſion of the Greateſt, to a Degree, that would be incredible in moſt Countries. For too many Countries there are, in which your ſmall Properties, your whole Diſpoſal of yourſelves, and your very Lives, would be ſubject to the Will of arbitrary Maſters: and you would neither dare to ſpeak a free Word, nor even to worſhip your Maker in the Way that your Conſciences direct you. Surely then your Condition requires of you, great Thankfulneſs, not only to God, but to your earthly Superiors, who allow and preſerve to you ſuch valuable Privileges; and great Reſpect, in your Manner, both of behaving towards them, and thinking of them: which is very ill ſhewn by murmuring againſt them for Things, that you cannot be Judges of, and in all Likelihood are utterly miſinformed about.

But farther: the loweſt Part of the Poor, in particular, ſhould conſider, what ample Proviſion for their Wants is made here by Law; ſuch

ſuch as no other Nation upon Earth hath eſtabliſhed: what noble Foundations, for their Relief under Sickneſs or Accidents, and for the Education of their Children, private Charity hath laid: and theſe Things ſhould diſpoſe them to a better Opinion, both of the Comforts of their own Condition, and of the Goodneſs of thoſe, to whom they are owing. If ſtill you are any of you in Diſtreſs, recollect, whether your own Miſmanagement hath not been the principal Occaſion of it; and lay the Blame, which you ought, upon yourſelves, before you lay any upon others. However, even in this Caſe you are to be relieved; but not ſo liberally, as if you had deſerved better. Conſider too, whether even now you are not able to get or to ſave more than you do: and remember that no one is bound to give you, what your own Diligence and Frugality would ſupply you with, if you pleaſed. But ſuppoſing your Want, and your Merit, as great as poſſible; it is not every one, to whom you apply, that can do for you what you imagine. Undoubtedly the Rich are often hard-hearted: but perhaps the Poor, are full as often, immoderate in their Expectations, and unjuſt in their Cenſures. You do not know, what Sums

People

People are able to give in Charity: for, in all likelihood, you are neither well acquainted with their Incomes, nor the various Demands that there are upon them, of other Sorts: which laſt may eaſily be greater, than you can well apprehend. Beſides, you do not know, what they do give in Charity. That which they refuſe to you, or your Acquaintance, they may beſtow, and perhaps much more, on others, who poſſibly are full as proper Objects, whatever you may think. And I doubt not, but many a good Man is frequently curſed, for denying a Trifle to a clamorous publick Petitioner; who hath been largely and willingly bountiful to private Diſtreſſes, perhaps but the Hour before; and it may be, doth more Service by his prudent Choice, than his liberal Diſtribution. We ought not indeed to paſs over any of the Poor, from Partiality or Penuriouſneſs; but *give to every one that aſketh*[q], ſo far as our Circumſtances permit us, and the End of giving, will be ſerved by it. But as giving to ſome would do Harm, and we cannot give to all enough to do them Good, Charity itſelf forbids us to interpret this Precept in the Fulneſs of its literal Extent. Yet God forbid,

[q] Luke vi. 30.

that

that any ſhould ſeek a Pretext for relieving few or none, becauſe many are undeſerving, and they cannot relieve every one. Such a Plea will not excuſe them in the Opinion of Men here; much leſs in that awful Judgment hereafter, when the *Rich and the Poor* ſhall *meet together* before the *Lord, the Maker of them all*[r]. But as the Wealthy ſhould not contrive to evade Almſgiving, ſo the Needy ſhould not be forward to ſuſpect them of it; but reſolve to *judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord come, who will make manifeſt the Counſels of the Heart*[s].

One Thing more, to be obſerved by you in Favour of your Condition, is, that God hath not left you to depend ſolely on the Piety and Charity of the Rich; but provided, that their Love of Gain, their Vanity, or their Luxury, ſhall be made what they do not deſign them for, the Means of doing ſome Good to their Inferiors, by employing them; as well as much Harm, by ſetting them an ill Example. More Good might be done indeed, and all the Harm avoided, would they act from the Principles they ought. For the Follies and Vices of one Part of Mankind, are far from being the proper Method of maintaining the other. But

[r] Prov. xxii. 2. [s] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

however,

however, it is a remarkable Inſtance of the Kindneſs of Providence, to have ordered Things ſo, that they who mean you little or no Service, ſhall do you a great deal: and contribute, without thinking of it, to make your Condition comfortable, while perhaps they are making themſelves wretched, both in this Life and that which is to come.

Upon the whole then it appears, that you have no Ground of Complaint againſt God; and much leſs, perhaps than you imagined, againſt Men; that your State hath many Comforts belonging to it; and uſually not many neceſſary Sufferings, beyond what others feel. But when any of you have the moſt, only do your Duty faithfully and prudently, and you may compoſe your Minds with a full Aſſurance, that at length all ſhall end well: *Your light Afflictions, which are but for a Moment, ſhall work for you an eternal Weight of Glory*[t], in the next World: and in this, as God hath enabled you to bear them hitherto, he will doubtleſs enable you to bear them ſtill; nay, perhaps lighten your Burthen when you leaſt think of it. *For the Poor ſhall not alway be forgotten: the patient Abiding of the Meek ſhall*

[t] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

not

*not periſh for ever*[u]. *The Eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, on them that put their Truſt in his Mercy; to deliver their Soul from Death, and keep them alive in the Time of Famine*[w]. *Truſt in the Lord, and do good: ſo ſhalt thou dwell in the Land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed*[x]. Some Means or other Heaven will point out to you, to prevent your falling into the utmoſt Extremities. Providence is your Security: the greateſt Perſons on Earth have no better. Without a Title to God's Favour, no one can be happy: and with it, no one needs be miſerable. For *whether a Man be rich, or poor; if he have a good Heart towards the Lord, he ſhall at all Times rejoice, with a cheerful Countenance*[y].

[u] Pſ. ix. 18. [w] Pſ. xxxiii. 18, 19. [x] Pſ. xxxvii. 3.
[y] Ecclus xxvi. 4.

SER-

# SERMON XI.

MATTH. xi. 5.

—*And the Poor have the Goſpel preached to them.*

ONE principal Mark of true Religion is its Tendency to make Men firſt good, then happy. Precepts of Piety and Virtue, unattended with Rewards, will always be ineffectual: and Promiſes of Rewards, independent upon Piety and Virtue, muſt of Neceſſity be falſe. Chriſtianity therefore comprehends both, and propoſes them equally to all Mankind: requiring Obedience from the Greateſt, as a Condition of God's Favour; and offering eternal Felicity to the Meaneſt, on Performance of their Duties. For this Reaſon I have lately ſet before you the peculiar Duties of the upper Part of the World, and have ſince proceeded to

thoſe of the lower. The only one of the latter, which I have hitherto mentioned, is, that they be content with their Condition; and neither murmur at all againſt God, who never gives them Cauſe; nor complain of Men more than they have Cauſe; nor be dejected in their own Minds; but compoſe and ſupport themſelves by attending to the Comforts of the State they are in, as well as the Inconveniencies of it. With this I choſe to begin, and to inſiſt on it largely, becauſe, when once the Poor are convinced, that they may be happy, they will naturally and cheerfully endeavour to become ſo: for which End they muſt learn,

2. To be humble: a Virtue cloſely connected with the former. For as Pride is uſually the Origin of Diſcontent; ſo Diſcontent in Return nouriſhes Pride; till after thinking falſely their preſent Situation too bad for them, Men come by Degrees to think hardly any ſufficiently good. Now all may find great Reaſon for Humility, on viewing the Imperfections and Frailties of human Nature in general, and their own in particular: but the Poor have additional Subjects of Mortification to reflect on; they ſee and feel themſelves inferior to moſt around them, dependent probably on ſome for

their

their Livelihood; and are excluded from the Poſſibility of many Improvements and Advantages, which others enjoy, ſtill this is no Ground for Diſſatisfaction. For that ſome are in a better Condition, cannot really change theirs into a worſe. It remains, notwithſtanding, juſt what it would be, if none were better. And making Compariſons only to diſquiet yourſelves, is great Folly. But making them, to learn from that Inferiority in which you are placed, a ſuitable Way of thinking and behaving, is ſo needful and ſo obvious a Leſſon both of Wiſdom and Duty, that neglecting it is inexcuſable.

Thoſe Minds muſt be grievouſly hardened in the Wrong, that can have no Impreſſion made on them by ſuch peculiarly ſtrong Calls to be modeſt and ſubmiſſive. Nor will this prove a leſs unhappy Diſpoſition, than it is a faulty one: but, in all likelihood, you will ſuffer more from the abſurd Haughtineſs of your Temper, than all the Hardſhips of your outward Circumſtances put together. Inſtead of eſteeming or pitying you, the World will diſlike and ſcorn you. For the Son of *Sirach* expreſſes only what every one in ſome Meaſure feels, when having ſaid, *three Sorts of Men my*

*Soul hateth, and I am greatly offended at their Life*; he puts down in the firſt Place, *a poor Man that is proud*[a]. Pride in thoſe, who ſhould be the fartheſt from it, is extremely diſguſtful, even when it is harmleſs: but uſually it leads on to inſolent Behaviour. Now Inſolence to Superiors may produce unſpeakable Miſchiefs to you; but will always produce ſome: and though it be confined to your Equals or Inferiors, will be the Source of perpetual Uneaſineſs, as well as Guilt. Yet I am afraid it is exceeding common for the lower Ranks to uſe thoſe, who are but a little beneath them, with ſuch Contempt and Harſhneſs as they ſeldom or never experience from the higheſt above them; and would not think it tolerable, if they did. But ſurely then you ſhould be willing to give the Treatment, you expect to receive: and ſeeing, as you muſt, how well Condeſcenſion becomes your Betters; think how ill, Aſſuming and Overbearing becomes you. But ſuppoſing your Haughtineſs injurious or diſpleaſing to no one elſe, it will be greatly detrimental to yourſelf. You have formerly been in good Circumſtances perhaps, or you are deſcended from a good

[a] Eccluſ xxv. 2.

Family;

Family; and therefore you will not bring down your Heart to your preſent Condition. But what follows from this? Only that ſtruggling under the Yoke makes it gall you the more; and you are ten Times uneaſier, than you need to be: whereas would you but accommodate your Spirit to your Station; you would ſoon be ſenſible, that with Men as well as God, *he that humbleth himſelf ſhall be exalted*[b]: You would enjoy, in this World, a peaceful Compoſure of Soul; and in the next, that Bleſſedneſs, which is reſerved for the Meek and Lowly.

But of all Sorts of Pride in the Poor, the ſtrangeſt and moſt pernicious is that, which tempts not a few of them to imagine, they are of too much Conſequence to do any Thing for their own Maintenance. Indeed when they have formerly been of good Rank and lived in Plenty, eſpecially when their Fall from it is not owing to wilful Sins or Follies, it ſhould be the Endeavour of their Relations and Friends to provide for them, in ſome Degree, ſuitably to what they once were. But if ſuch as are eſpecially concerned, either cannot or will not do this, there is little Room to expect, that

[b] Matth. xxiii. 12.

others ſhould contribute enough towards it to be effectual. And therefore the unhappy Perſons whoſe Caſe it is, unleſs Providence raiſe them up ſome unlooked-for Support, ſink down of Courſe to the Level of the common Poor: and it cannot be more the Duty of the charitable to help them, than it is theirs to help themſelves by any Sort of honeſt Employment, for which they are qualified. Once Heaven had placed you in a higher Sphere; now it hath reduced you to a lower: the Occupations of the latter are as much incumbent upon you at preſent, as thoſe of the former were before: and your Attention to them will be as amply rewarded by the Diſpoſer of all Things. You muſt ſupport yourſelf, either by virtuous Diligence, or by vicious Courſes. The latter nothing can juſtify: the former, in whatever way you are called to exerciſe it, will be no Reproach, but an Honour to you. And the Rich and Great, far from rejecting and diſowning their poor Kindred or Acquaintance, for condeſcending to any uſeful Buſineſs, when Neceſſity requires, ought to encourage and applaud them. For it is an excellent Mark of a right and good Mind, that they rather chuſe *to work with Quietneſs, and eat their*

own

*own Bread*[c], than importune others, or lead themſelves into Temptation. And indeed the Temptations, ariſing from Poverty and Diſtreſs, are ſo very dangerous to thoſe who have lived in Affluence and Credit; that as ſoon as ever they find Difficulties coming upon them, (if they have any Regard to a good Conſcience) they muſt immediately reduce their own Expences, lower the Appearance and Expectations of thoſe who depend on them, and ſo conduct every Thing, as may leaſt expoſe them to the Hazard of acting amiſs, and beſt ſecure them an honeſt Subſiſtence. For, whatever a falſe Honour may ſuggeſt to the contrary, *Better is he that laboureth, and aboundeth in all Things, than he that boaſteth himſelf and wanteth Bread*[d]. The Mention of this Matter hath led me inſenſibly to a

3d Duty of the Poor, and a very important one, that of Induſtry; to which Humility will greatly incline them, nor will Contentment be at all inconſiſtent with it. For a principal Reaſon why the Poor may be juſtly contented, is, that by Diligence they may go on very comfortably; and their being well enough ſatisfied with their preſent Situation is no Manner

[c] 2 Theſſ. iii. 12. [d] Ecclus x. 27.

of Objection againſt endeavouring to better it, when Opportunity offers. Every one indeed is bound to be induſtrious, in a Way ſuitable to his Rank, and contribute his Proportion to the common Good, in which he ſhares. Thoſe of high Degree are able to do much Good ſingly; the Poor have each of them very little ſeparate Power: but, conſidered as a collective Body, it is on their Application and Labour that the Wealth and Strength of Nations, all the Conveniences and Elegances of Life, indeed the Peace and good Order of Societies depend; for nothing but right Employment will keep them out of wrong. Theſe Conſiderations make their Diligence of infinite Importance to the Public; and there are others, beſides their Intereſt in the Public, that make it of equal Importance to themſelves. It is true, in point of Conſcience, the Rich are no leſs obliged to it than you; but in point of worldly Neceſſity, the Difference is very wide. Nor yet is it any Diſadvantage to you on the whole, that in this Particular you cannot well avoid acting as you ought. For to how many of your Superiors is it the greateſt Unhappineſs, that their Circumſtances enable them to lead the Lives they do!

But,

But, in your Situation, indulging Idleneſs and its Companions can laſt but a very ſhort Time; and then will bring after it ſuch dreadful Conſequences, of Diſtreſs and Reproach, and Temptation to every Thing bad, (extending not only to you, but to all who belong to you) that you muſt reſolve to follow ſome honeſt Employment cloſely. Be it ever ſo much againſt your Liking at firſt, you will certainly come in Time to be very well pleaſed with it. Every one, that hath perſevered, hath found it ſo. And then, you will ſpend the reſt of your Days in Satisfaction and Comfort; you will be at Peace within, and reſpected both by your Equals and your Betters: if you have Children, you will look upon them with Delight, and they upon you with Gratitude; you will make a Proviſion againſt Sickneſs and Accidents; and when you come to old Age, you will be able to afford yourſelf the Reſt and Quiet you want, becauſe you were willing to take Pains before: whereas they, who make Eaſe and Pleaſure the Buſineſs of their early Years, will find Shame and Sorrow the Portion of the Remainder. They wickedly neglect the appointed Way of ſupporting themſelves; and ſuch as do, will commonly have bitter

Experience of what it is to crave Support from the Bounty of others. *The Life of him, that dependeth on another Man's Table*, ſaith the Son of *Sirach, is not to be counted for a Life---Begging is ſweet in the Mouth of the Shameful, but in his Belly there ſhall burn a Fire*[e]. Sayings of this Nature are not in the leaſt deſigned againſt Perſons, whom Providence hath rendered incapable of ſupplying their own Neceſſities. They have nothing to be aſhamed of, but ought to be aſſiſted with Tenderneſs and Reſpect. God hath ſent them to us to receive at our Hands what is their Due; and whoſo *mocketh* ſuch *Poor*, *Solomon* hath declared, *reproacheth their Maker*[f]. But thoſe who would not be induſtrious when they could, deſerve but little Relief afterwards, unleſs deep Repentance intitle them to a better Share; and they that will not now when they can, deſerve none at all. It was St. *Paul*'s repeated Command to the *Theſſalonians, that if any one would not work, neither ſhould he eat*[g]. And we ſhould all obſerve this Command, both in the Diſpoſal of our own Charity, and of any other with which we are intruſted, either by private Benefactors, or by the Laws of the Land.

[e] Ecclus xl. 29, 30. [f] Prov. xvii. 5. [g] 2 Theſſ. iii. 10.

Over-

Overſeers of the Poor are intruſted by the latter; intruſted to act with Humanity and Compaſſion indeed, but with Prudence and Frugality at the ſame Time. All therefore who in their Turns come to ſerve that Office, I hope conſider very ſeriouſly, that the Poor, who are fit for Employment, ought, as far as poſſible, to find it for themſelves, or have it found for them; and that when either of theſe Things can at all be done, maintaining them in Idleneſs is only teaching them to be uſeleſs and wicked. Indeed the Poor themſelves ſhould conſider, that contriving to live upon Alms, when they are able, wholly or in Part, to live upon the Produce of their own Labour, is injuring the Community, by doing nothing to promote its Welfare; injuring all who contribute to their Support, by laying a needleſs Burthen upon them; injuring the reſt of the Poor, by keeping from them what elſe they would receive in greater Plenty. For no one can beſtow ſo much on proper Objects, who is miſled to beſtow on improper ones too. And the Frequency of ſuch Impoſitions makes many unwilling to give what elſe they would; and furniſhes others with a ſpecious Pretence for withholding what elſe, with any Decency,

they

they could not. Therefore Induſtry, beſides its being an indiſpenſable Duty of the Poor, in itſelf, is neceſſary to their practiſing a further Duty, to which I proceed in the

4th Place; that is Honeſty. For to beg, inſtead of working, is one Sort of Diſhoneſty. To undertake any Work for another, and not do it diligently, is a ſecond Sort; often a very provoking, ſometimes a very miſchievous one. Yet there is a third ſtill groſſer, to which Idleneſs tempts them but too powerfully, mentioned in *Agur*'s wiſe Prayer, *leſt I be poor and ſteal*[h]. Now Stealth, open or ſecret, how commonly ſoever it be committed, is much too plainly a Sin to be in general defended; and therefore I need not prove to you the Unlawfulneſs of it. But there are two Caſes notwithſtanding, in which ſome of the Poor ſeem to think it ſcarce any Fault at all: when either a very ſmall Matter is taken away, or it is from a very rich Perſon, which makes it ſmall to him. But every one hath the ſame Right to the leaſt Part of his Property that he hath to the greateſt. And let any one be ever ſo wealthy, his Wealth is his own; and though unqueſtionably he ought to give of it to the

[h] Prov. xxx. 9.

Poor,

Poor, yet they have no Manner of Authority to take it without his Conſent. If they had, it is eaſy to ſee into what univerſal Confuſion the Exerciſe of that Authority would bring the World. But farther: ſmall Miſdemeanors of this Kind occaſion great Diſquiet; Men apprehend themſelves unſafe in all about them; know not whom to truſt; and the Innocent are often ſuſpected and Sufferers, for what the Guilty thus do. Beſides, almoſt all Offenders begin with little Faults; and from theſe they venture gradually on, to worſe and worſe, till they come to make no Scruple of the moſt capital Crimes, and perhaps fall under the Sentence due to them. Always remember therefore to beware even of ſmall Sins; and carefully obſerve one Rule more, that when any Thing is committed to your Truſt, being diſhoneſt in that, and diſpoſing of any Part of it in a Manner, which you know you ought not, and are not allowed, is one of the baſeſt Kinds of Stealing. Waſtefulneſs alſo, and even mere Negligence, approach to the ſame Sin; for by both you injuriouſly diminiſh what is not your own. But the moſt active Cauſe of Diſhoneſty in the Poor is, that finding a great deal of Time and Pains requiſite to get but a ſmall Matter, they

are

are ſtrongly tempted to ſhorten their Trouble by unfair Methods. And poſſibly you may thus gain ſome Advantages for a while; but very poſſibly alſo you may fail, and be diſcovered and puniſhed even for your firſt Attempt; or if not, every new Attempt will expoſe you anew to the ſame Danger; and it is not one in great Numbers that eſcapes long. Beſides, the continual Conſciouſneſs of your Guilt, and Fear of being found out, and hated and ſcorned ever after, will be a continual Torment to you; nay, if you are only ſuſpected, and cannot fully confute the Suſpicion, which a guilty Perſon can never do, this alone, in all Probability, may be enough to ruin you. For the Livelihood of the Poor depends almoſt intirely on their Character, and their Character chiefly conſiſts in their Honeſty. That will make Amends for conſiderable Defects in other Points, but nothing will make Amends for Want of that. Or could you eſcape every Evil that you juſtly fear through this whole Life, yet remember another is to follow it very ſoon, in which you muſt account for all your Deeds. And he who hath commanded, that *no Man defraud or go beyond his Brother in any Matter*,

*Matter*, hath declared at the ſame Time, that *the Lord is the Avenger of all ſuch*[1].

A further Virtue, which the Poor are greatly concerned to practiſe, much more carefully than many of them do, is that of ſpeaking Truth. But this is ſo near akin to behaving honeſtly, the Reaſons for both are ſo much the ſame, and they that do nothing amiſs have ſo little Temptation to ſay any Thing falſe, that I ſhall paſs it over at preſent. The

5th Duty therefore of the Poor, which I ſhall inſiſt on, is that of Frugality; without which your Honeſty will never be ſecure, and the Fruits of your Induſtry will be very fooliſhly thrown away. Indeed to deny yourſelves what you can well afford, and really want, would be cruel and unnatural; ſuffering the worſt Inconveniences of Poverty without Need. But to make your ſtrait Circumſtances yet ſtraiter, for the Sake of idle Gratifications, and diſtreſs yourſelves in Neceſſaries, only to indulge in Trifles and Vanities, delicate Food, ſhewiſh Dreſs, enſnaring Diverſions, is every Way wrong. You will be hankering after more and more Pleaſures and Amuſements, till they quite beggar you; your Superiors all the while,

[1] 1 Theſſ. iv. 6.

whom

whom you affect to imitate, will deſpiſe you; your Equals will hate and cenſure you; and your Children, for whom at this Rate you will provide nothing but a bad Example, will have Cauſe, I had almoſt ſaid, to curſe you: whereas, by avoiding unneceſſary Expences, you will preſerve the Fruits of your Labour intire; be able to make good Uſe of Advantages; to ſtand your Ground under Loſſes and Diſappointments, for they muſt be expected; to lay up for yourſelves, if you prove to have Occaſion; if not, for thoſe that come after you: nay, to give Alms out of your little, and exchange it for Treaſures in Heaven. Saving is very different from being covetous; it is the ſureſt Foundation for being bountiful. And even the Poor ſhould extend Bounty to any that are ſtill poorer, whenever they can really ſpare it. Nature and Reaſon call upon them to do ſo; agreeably to which the Apoſtle requires Men to *work with their own Hands, that they may have to give to him that needeth* [k]. And as our Saviour hath taught us [l], that our Charity ſhall be eſtimated in Proportion to our Abilities, the loweſt have as much Encouragement

[k] Eph. iv. 28. [l] Mark xii. 42.

as the higheſt to do, even in this Way, all the Good they can. A

6th Virtue, cloſely connected with Frugality, is Sobriety. One ſhould think, that they who find themſelves perpetually in Straits could have little Temptation to be guilty of Exceſſes. But Uneaſineſs at their Condition drives ſome, a falſe Notion of recruiting their Spirits invites others, and unmeaning Cuſtom ſeduces yet more, into that deſtructive Vice of Drinking; which, after ſoothing you perhaps with a ſhort-lived Gaiety and Forgetfulneſs of Sorrow, will greatly augment the Dejection of your Minds, as well as the Difficulties of your Affairs; and thus force you almoſt to a Repetition of the ſame Remedy, which will be followed of courſe by an Increaſe of the ſame Evils, till your Fortunes and Healths are both completely ruined. Your Morals too, for the moſt Part, by Indulgence in this one Reſpect, will be gradually corrupted in every other, even if you do eſcape thoſe deſperate Sallies of Wickedneſs which prove more ſpeedily fatal. Your Families at the ſame Time, if you have any, will be abandoned to Wretchedneſs; your Children perhaps murdered in their Infancy, by giving them the ſame Liquors with which

you

you are more leiſurely deſtroying yourſelves; or if they do ſurvive, are pretty ſure to inherit, from ſuch Parents, nothing but bad Habits of Body and Mind. If therefore you have any Senſe, either of Prudence or Humanity, you will ſurely avoid this treacherous Sin; which pernicious Arts, and miſtaken Policy, have placed but too much within the Reach of the loweſt of the Poor: or if you have fallen into it, you will renounce it inſtantly, and reſolutely bear the Uneaſineſs which abſtaining from it may give you for a while, (for you will certainly overcome it by Perſeverance) rather than plunge forwards to your utter Undoing here and hereafter. A

7th Duty of the Poor, which muſt be mentioned, is that of Chaſtity; a Duty, indeed, of all Perſons, but ſo far peculiarly incumbent on them, as the Tranſgreſſion of it brings them to more immediate Ruin. In one Sex it is followed by total Loſs of honeſt Employment and Reputation; by Contempt and Scorn, even from the Men that have ſeduced them; by grievous Temptations to deſtroy the Fruits of their criminal Pleaſures, and to become abandoned to common Proſtitution, and with it to every Sin, the Conſequence of which will be

every

every Miſery of human Life. In the other Sex it is almoſt always accompanied with Breach of ſolemn Promiſes; with ſhocking Hardneſs of Heart, where the utmoſt Affection hath been profeſſed; with heavy Expences, that often lead to the groſſeſt Diſhoneſty. And both Sexes, in common, it expoſes to loathſome and fatal Diſeaſes, and to a dreadful Sentence of future Condemnation: for *they, which do ſuch Things*, the Scripture hath declared, *ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God* [m]. Beware then of a Sin ſo peculiarly dangerous; and for that Purpoſe beware of every Indiſcretion that may intice you to it. I now proceed, in the

8th Place, to another Duty of the Poor, which one ſhould think might ſufficiently recommend itſelf, good Temper amongſt each other. This is neceſſary in every Rank, in order to have any real Enjoyment of Life; and the more neceſſary in yours, as you have the fewer Enjoyments of other Sorts. If you receive harſh Treatment from thoſe above you, that perhaps you cannot help; but there is no Manner of Need of your giving it amongſt yourſelves. You have felt probably what bitter Things injurious Language and inſolent Beha-

[m] Gal. v. 21.

viour are; why then will you make Uſe of them? You know by Experience the Need of Tenderneſs and Pity, why will you not ſhew it to thoſe who have equal Need? You and they are Fellow-ſufferers in the World; ſurely that ſhould unite you in mutual Kindneſs, not provoke you to increaſe your Evils, by being hard upon one another. And yet, I fear, ſome of the greateſt Hardſhips, both in Word and Deed, which the lower Part of Mankind undergo, proceed from Perſons who are of low Rank themſelves. And how far they are capable of carrying ſuch Outrages, and how ſad the Effects of them are, *Solomon* hath expreſſed by a very ſtrong Compariſon: *A poor Man, that oppreſſeth the Poor, is like a ſweeping Rain, which leaveth no Food*[n]. I have only a

9th and laſt Duty to recommend, but one peculiarly implied in preaching the Goſpel to you, a ſerious and deep Reverence for Religion. Religion is intended, not only for the Direction, but the Comfort of all Degrees of Men; and all have Need enough of it, but you the moſt by far. Others have Honours, or Pleaſures, or Wealth, elegant Amuſements or curious Inquiries to engage their Thoughts; and find ſome

[n] Prov. xxviii. 3.

Kind

Kind of Satisfaction in these Things, such as it is, and so long as it lasts. But you have nothing, that even seems considerable, to sweeten this World to you, but the Expectation of a better. And well may it be for you, that you are reduced to that, as your only Choice, which beyond Comparison would be your best, if you had ever such Plenty. Seek your Consolation therefore in what is abundantly capable of giving it you; make the Precepts of the Gospel your Business, and its Promises your Joy. Christianity is peculiarly formed for your Benefit. Its Laws are your Charter, by which you claim a Right to Pity and Love from your Superiors, as Members of the same Body; and we, its Ministers, are your Advocates to plead your Cause with them; authorized to offer them eternal Happiness, for being kind to you; to denounce Condemnation against them, if they use you, in any one Respect, cruelly; and to assure you, at the same Time, that the worst Treatment they can give you shall turn to your Good. Think then how justly St. *James* hath declared *the Poor in this World rich in Faith*[*]; and let the Rich and Great, if they will, be profane and vicious, and take the Consequences: but *let*

[*] James ii. 5.

*no Man beguile you of your Reward* [p], either by corrupting your Principles, or misleading your Practice. Religion hath graciously provided for you the Repose and Comfort of this sacred Day, which else you had never known. Make it not a Time of acting contrary to Religion, but statedly use the Opportunities it gives you, of learning and being reminded of your several Duties, which you must be sensible you need; of having the Honour to join on equal Terms with the highest of your Fellow-creatures, in presenting Petitions and Praises to God in his House, and feeding at his holy Table. The Remainder of the Sabbath employ, partly in *considering your Ways* [q], and improving your Hearts, by Reading, Meditation, and Prayer in private: partly in a cheerful, but harmless and prudent, social Enjoyment of the Leisure which Heaven hath allowed you. When the Days of Labour return, recommend yourselves every Morning to the Blessing of the Almighty, return him Thanks every Night for his Protection, and offer up to him, in your Hearts, the Work of each Day, as done in Obedience to his Will, and in Hopes of his Reward: for these Things you will find a Support and Re-

[p] Col. ii. 18. [q] Hag. i. 5, 7.

freshment

freſhment beyond all Belief. In your whole Communication learn both to avoid and abhor that monſtrous Cuſtom of Oaths and Curſes, which are intermixed continually in the common Diſcourſe of too many of the Poor; with great Irreverence towards God, who hath expreſsly forbidden them; to the great Horror and Grief of all good Perſons; with great Danger of running into frequent Perjuries, and all Manner of Profaneneſs; and without any Pretence of Profit or Pleaſure, to make the leaſt Amends for ſo much Sin. I cannot, and need not, go through the other Obligations of Religion at preſent. Your Attendance here, your Bibles and other good Books at home, will ſufficiently inform you of the Nature and Importance of them; and I beg you not to imagine, that becauſe you are each of you ſingly of little Conſequence in the World, God will take little Notice of your Conduct; but think and act like the Pſalmiſt, *I am ſmall, and of no Reputation, yet do I not forget thy Commandments*[r]. There is nothing beneath God's Attention, any more than above it. The meaneſt Things on Earth were made and are continually preſerved and inſpected by him. But indeed the moſt

[r] Pſ. cxix. 141.

conſiderable Thing on Earth is the Behaviour of his rational Creatures; and whether that be right or wrong is of infinite Moment in his Sight; but whether they be high or low, of none at all. He *regardeth not the Rich more than the Poor, for they are all the Work of his Hands*[s], and ſhall all account to him for their Deeds. Our bleſſed Redeemer preached the Goſpel to the Poor, at leaſt as much as to the Rich; he laid down his Life equally for both; the Holy Spirit offers equally to both the ſanctifying Influences of his Grace; the Souls of both are equally capable of, and will equally be conſigned to, everlaſting Happineſs or Miſery. *I ſaw*, ſaith St. *John*, *a Throne, and him that ſat on it, from whoſe Face the Earth and the Heavens fled away, and there was found no Place for them. And I ſaw the Dead, ſmall and great, ſtand before God: and the Books were opened, and the Dead were judged out of thoſe Things which were written in the Books, according to their Works*[t].

This awful Scene firſt imprint ſtrongly on your own Minds; then on all you can, eſpecially on thoſe who belong to you. You have little elſe to give them, but if you give them

[s] Job xxxiv. 19. [t] Rev. xx. 11, 12.

effectually

effectually a practical Senſe of their Duty to God and Man, it is an Inheritance beyond all Treaſures. You muſt ſee how wicked, and how miſerable by their Wickedneſs, Multitudes of your own Rank are: ſuffer it not to be the Caſe of thoſe who are deareſt to you; but uſe the little ſpare Time you have (for you will always have ſome), and the little Ability you poſſeſs (for God will aſſiſt you), to inſtil into their Hearts ſuch early Principles of Piety and Virtue, as may afford you juſt Hopes of their being good and happy by your Means in this World, and then following you, to increaſe your Bleſſedneſs in the next.

# SERMON XII.

ISAIAH xxxviii. 1, 2.

*In thoſe Days was Hezekiah ſick unto Death: and Iſaiah the Prophet, the Son of Amoz, came unto him, and ſaid unto him, Thus ſaith the Lord, ſet thine Houſe in Order: for thou ſhalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his Face toward the Wall, and prayed unto the Lord.*

THESE Words preſent to our View a Perſon of the higheſt Rank, in the Prime of Life, and the full Tide of Proſperity, ſeized with a mortal Diſeaſe: a Caſe, which ought ſtrongly to remind the ſecureſt of us all, how uncertain our Condition is here on Earth. By the Goodneſs of God, a Prophet was ſent to him, to admoniſh him of the Preparation, that his State required: and the ſame Goodneſs hath provided, that you ſhall all be

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frequently admoniſhed of the ſame Thing, by the Miniſters of his Word. The Admonition, given him, was the Means of prolonging his Days in Peace and Comfort: and thoſe given you, if received in a right Manner, may, both naturally and providentially, contribute to procure you longer and happier Lives in this World; and will certainly lead you to a Life of eternal Happineſs in the next.

The Denunciation made to *Hezekiah*, however awful, is, by Virtue of the original Sentence of God, equally true of every Man, *Thou ſhalt die, and not live.* The healthieſt of us is ſick of an incurable Diſtemper: whether it ſhall laſt a few Years, or a few Days only, before it carries us off, is all the Doubt: and the Difference is much leſs, than we are apt to think it. Would we but conſider, how quick the Time is gone, which we have lived over, and are dead to, already; to how ſmall a Matter the Remainder, which will flee away juſt as faſt, can at moſt amount; and how much ſhort of that we may fall, and in all likelihood ſhall, ſince moſt Men do; we ſhould have little Need of Monitors concerning Mortality. Youth is but the Morning, and full Strength but the Noon of a ſhort Day: throughout the whole

whole of which, every Refreſhment of Nature intimates to us its continual Decays; every Loſs of a Friend or Acquaintance tell us, how frail we are ourſelves; every Sickneſs calls upon us, with a louder Voice, to think of our Diſſolution; and thoſe Diſorders, which may ſeem to whiſper it more gently, often bring it on with ſurpriſing Suddenneſs. But at leaſt old Age gives us, uſually the Feeling, always the plain Sight, of its more immediate and unavoidable Approach.

Such conſtant Warning of this important and irrevocable Change was doubtleſs intended to produce a conſtant Regard to it: and if we take every Way to drive out of our Minds, what Providence hath taken ſo many Ways to fix in them; it is really *fighting againſt God*[a], and that in a Point of the utmoſt Concern to us. But then the Thought of our latter End is not deſigned to diſquiet and deject us without Need or Uſe; but only to engage us in reaſoning upon it ſo juſtly, and preparing for it ſo wiſely, as that when it comes, (for ſooner or later it muſt) we may meet it with Comfort.

It is very true, the beſt Preparation for Sickneſs and Death is a good Life; and whilſt we

[a] Acts v. 39.

neglect

neglect this, no other can be effectual. But then too many have neglected it: and there is the utmoſt Neceſſity for them to think, and to be aſſiſted in thinking, of whatever they can do towards retrieving ſo fatal an Error. Nay, with Reſpect to others; as the Rules of a good Life extend to our Behaviour in all Circumſtances, ſo there muſt be ſome of them peculiarly appropriated to the nearer Proſpect of our Departure hence. And as every Thing ſhould be learnt, in the beſt Degree it can, before we want it for Practice; and ſuch Things eſpecially, as are difficult, and yet of Moment; ſo ſtudying in our Health the Duties of a ſick Bed; contriving beforehand to make them as few and eaſy as poſſible; and forming ourſelves to a Diſpoſition of going through them as we ought, is no ſmall Part of religious Wiſdom. If you delay, till the Time of Illneſs comes, (and who can foreſee, how ſoon that may happen?) for ſome Things it will be too late; of ſome you will be ignorant; others you will forget: and thoſe about you too commonly will be unable, or unwilling, or afraid, to remind you of them. They, whoſe Office it is, will ſcarce have an Opportunity given them of attending you: or if they have,

will

will ſcarce know on the ſudden, how to make great Uſe of it. And upon the whole, but little will be done of what ſhould be done.

We all pray, as often as we join in the Litany, againſt *ſudden Death.* They are undoubtedly the happieſt, who have the leaſt Occaſion to pray againſt it; but there are few, if any, who have none. And ſuch, as profeſs to deſire inſtead of fearing it, would do well to conſider, whether they are ſo very ſure as this implies, that every Part, both of their worldly Affairs, and of their eternal Concerns, is in the beſt Order and Condition, to which they can bring it: or whether in Reality this appearing Readineſs to die at any Time, without Warning, be not merely a Dread to think of dying at all, as a Matter near at Hand; unleſs it be ſomewhat ſtill worſe, Diſbelief or Forgetfulneſs of what will follow after. But in vain do we petition, that our Death may not be ſudden, if we reſolve that it ſhall: which in Effect we do, in proportion as we omit thoſe Proviſions for the Time of its Coming, without which it muſt, in the worſt Senſe *come upon us unawares* [b], be its Advances ever ſo ſlow.

We ought therefore to learn in Health what will be incumbent on us in Sickneſs. And

[b] Luke xxi. 34.

ſince

ſince few chuſe to teach themſelves the Precepts, which belong to ſo unpleaſing a Situation, it remains, that all be taught them here: and the Leſſon is of univerſal Benefit. For in his Turn, every one muſt expect to be in a State of Weariſomeneſs and Pain, of Weakneſs and Danger: and beſides, the particular Duties of that State, are, more or leſs, the general Duties of human Life: ſo that whoever is truly conſiderate and ſerious, will doubtleſs be glad to have them laid before him. This therefore I ſhall endeavour to do, in the Method pointed out by the Text: which mentions the Obligations of ſick Perſons,

I. Reſpecting their Fellow-Creatures: *ſet thine Houſe in Order.*

II. Reſpecting more immediately God and their own Souls. *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord.*

The Phraſe, which expreſſes the former, *ſet thine Houſe in Order*, may be tranſlated more literally, *Given Command concerning*, or, *to thine Houſe.* And this Direction may well be enlarged beyond our Family ſtrictly ſo called, by a Parity of Reaſon, to comprehend, both ſuch Regulations of all Affairs in which we are intereſted, and

and ſuch Advice to all Perſons, with whom we are connected, as appear needful. I ſhall treat of it therefore in each of theſe Views; but at preſent only in the firſt.

Now this includes the general, and, for ought we know, final Arrangement of our worldly Concerns. As theſe are frequently either extenſive, or intricate, or perfectly underſtood by none but ourſelves; every one ought to be careful, and ſince they are not, *ſhould often be put in Remembrance*, as the Office for the Sick in ſo many Words appoints, *to take Order for ſettling their temporal Eſtates, while they are in Health*. Not many, it may be feared, have Reaſon to be contented, that every Thing ſhould lie, at the Hour of their Death, juſt as it doth now. Some have ſpent a great Part of their Lives in putting their Houſes out of Order, in perplexing and ruining their Affairs, by Extravagance, Negligence or Ill-Management. Theſe have ſingular Need to reſtore them, without Delay, to the beſt Poſture they can. And ſuch, as may have acted very prudently on the Suppoſition of living long, may yet have done little or nothing in regard to the Poſſibility of dying ſoon. Now Sickneſs frequently affords but little Time;

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and almoſt always brings along with it Uneaſineſs full enough for us to bear, without the additional Weight of Buſineſs. Beſides, in that Condition, our Judgment, or Memory, or Attention may be impaired: Weakneſs of Spirits may ſubject us to undue Impreſſions from thoſe, who are about us: our trueſt Friends and ableſt and propereſt Adviſers may be accidentally abſent, or artfully kept from us: in ſhort, one way or another, there is a great Hazard of our doing Things wrongly, or at beſt imperfectly. Fears or Suſpicions of this may grievouſly diſquiet us, and add to our Danger: or, though we apprehend that no Evils will ariſe, from our Want of timely Caution, to thoſe whom we leave behind us, they may come to feel very dreadful ones. And why ſhould not all this be prevented? We muſt leave what we have, whether we diſpoſe of it, or not. And if we defer diſpoſing of it, becauſe we have not the Heart to do it; ſuch a Heart ſhould not be indulged, but amended. The Difficulty of ſettling Things, or the Uncertainty how to ſettle them, will ſcarce grow leſs by putting it off to the laſt. If any Alteration of Circumſtances, or of our Opinion, ſhould happen after our Diſpoſition is made, it

may be altered accordingly. And that ſtrange Imagination of being nearer Death, for having completed this or any Proviſion for it, is a poor abſurd Superſtition, confuted by daily Experience. On the contrary, you will be more at Eaſe, and likely to live the longer, for having done your Duty in this Reſpect. And by making ſure to do it in time, you may obviate great Injuſtice, grievous Contentions and Enmities, long and vaſt Expences, where, if they be not obviated, the Fault will lie at your Door.

Every one therefore ſhould take the earlieſt Care of theſe Matters. But if any one hath omitted it, the Office before-mentioned expreſsly requires, that he *be admoniſhed* in his Sickneſs *to make his Will, and to declare his Debts, what he oweth, and what is owing unto him, for the better diſcharging of his Conſcience, and the Quietneſs of his Executors.* We of the Clergy have now but ſeldom the Means allowed us of giving you this or any other Admonition at ſuch Times. I hope, it is not our Fault. Conſider, if it be not yours. But however that be, we may and we ought to do it from the Pulpit: where, ſpeaking openly to all in general, we cannot be ſuſpected of any private unfair De-

ſign, into whatever Particulars the Subject may lead us.

The principal Point, at which Men ſhould aim in ſettling their temporal Affairs, is Juſtice: and one of the moſt evident Branches of Juſtice is paying Debts. Our firſt Care therefore ſhould be, never to contract Debts, which we cannot reaſonably hope to pay: and our next, to ſecure the Payment of thoſe, which we have contracted, as fully and ſpeedily as we can. Elſe we ſhall be in continual Danger of injuring, perhaps diſtreſſing and undoing, Perſons and Families, only for thinking well enough of us to truſt us. It is extremely diſhonourable, (I might uſe a harſher Word) at any Seaſon of Life, to indulge our Idleneſs, gratify our Fancies and Appetites, or ſupport our Rank, at their Expence. But when Sickneſs gives us a Proſpect of never being juſt to them, unleſs we are ſo immediately, we have then every poſſible Motive for labouring moſt earneſtly to indemnify them. And we ought to prefer the Demands, which they have upon us, before all mere Proprieties, however reaſonable; contrive good Security for them out of whatever we fairly can: and if, after all, we cannot do it effectually, recommend them,

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as far as ever there is any Plea for it, to the Compaſſion of our ſurviving Repreſentatives and Relations. But as we cannot be certain that they will, and in ſeveral Caſes there may be no Reaſon why they ſhould, do what we deſire: the only ſure way is, to provide, before it is too late, for doing it ourſelves. If our Circumſtances are upon the whole ſufficient to anſwer all Claims; barely making known the Debts due from us, and owing to us, or at moſt ſtating them with the Parties concerned, may be enough; and where it is wanted, employing ſome Thought and Pains on ſuch Matters, as we are able, will be doing very good Service both to our Creditors, and to our Heirs.

But beſides thoſe, who are commonly called Creditors, there is another, and much more dreadful Sort: I mean thoſe, to whom we have done Injuries, and owe Reſtitution. Injuries ought never to be done. When they are done, Reſtitution, if it can, ought to be made immediately: and till it is offered ſo far as our Ability extends, we remain both Debtors and Sinners. If we defer it to the laſt, we may never make it at all: and though we do, whether God will then accept it, muſt be doubtful: but if even then we refuſe it, unleſs the

Cauſe be that we excuſably miſtake the Nature of the Caſe, we preſerve no Ground for Hope. It is unſpeakably better therefore to think ſeriouſly at any time, than never, what Wrongs or what Hardſhips any of our Fellow-Creatures have ſuffered from us: and to what ſuitable Compenſation they are intitled, either in ſtrict Juſtice, or in Equity and good Conſcience. The Anſwer to this Queſtion may often be a very afflicting one: but if Men will do amiſs, they muſt take the Conſequences. It may alſo, in ſome Caſes, be difficult to fix upon the right Anſwer, or to find proper Methods of putting it in Practice, if we know it: but we muſt not, on Account of Difficulties, lay aſide the Thought of doing our Duty; but aſk the beſt Advice, where we are at a Loſs; leave Directions, to be executed by others, where we have not Time ourſelves; and at leaſt make due Acknowledgements, unleſs particular Circumſtances forbid, where we cannot make Amends. Perhaps nothing further than Acknowledgements will be expected by thoſe, whom we have injured: and then we are bound to nothing further.

But as we have all more or leſs Need to aſk Pardon, another of our Duties evidently is, to

grant

grant it in our Turn: when others have uſed us ill, not to *recompenſe*, or wiſh them, *Evil for Evil*[c]; not to deny them proper Kindneſſes; or even think of them worſe, than they deſerve: to accept any Submiſſions, that do but approach towards being ſufficient; and be reconciled to them, not in Words alone, which is adding Hypocriſy to Reſentment, but in Reality; affording them as large Proofs, both of our Favour and Confidence, as any good and wiſe Man, unintereſted in the Matter, would think fitting; ſeriouſly wiſhing their Good, in Soul, Body and Eſtate; and being ready to promote it, as far as we properly can. This is the full Meaning of being in Charity; which we ought to be conſtantly in with all Men: and, if the Reaſon of our profeſſing to be ſo, is merely that we imagine our End to be near; it will be extremely queſtionable, whether we are ſo indeed. Yet a late, nay an imperfect Reconciliation is always preferable to none, provided there be any Sincerity in it. For the Expedient, to which, it is ſaid, ſome have had Recourſe, of forgiving if they die, and being revenged if they live, is as wicked and as fooliſh a Contrivance to deceive them-

[c] Rom. xii. 17.

ſelves and to mock God, as the human Heart can frame. We may indeed have forgiven, yet not have declared our Forgiveneſs: and it may poſſibly be prudent, nay kind, in ſome Caſes, to ſuſpend that Declaration, at leaſt in Part, for a while; though ſeldom, if ever, very long. But at fartheſt, when Death appears to threaten us, it is high Time to allow, both ourſelves, and all with whom we are concerned, the Comfort of ſeeing our Differences, if poſſible, intirely made up: that we may lie under no Imputation at our Departure of any Thing unmeet for thoſe Manſions of Peace, that we hope we are going to inhabit. The ſame Office therefore, which I have already quoted more than once, requires in particular, that the ſick Perſon *be exhorted to forgive, from the Bottom of his Heart, all that have offended him; and if he hath offended any other, to aſk them Forgiveneſs; and where he hath done Injury or Wrong to any Man, that he make Amends to the uttermoſt of his Power.*

The next Thing, after providing for the Payment of our Debts, and which, like that, ſhould be done in Health, but much rather in Sickneſs than not at all, is diſpoſing of the Remainder of our Subſtance: a Matter comprehending too great a Variety

Variety of Caſes, to permit any other than general Directions from this Place. The principal Rule is, that we ought not to be governed in it, to any conſiderable Degree, by fanciful Fondneſſes, much leſs by blameable Reſentments: but act on ſuch Grounds, as not only we ourſelves, but other Men of unqueſtioned Prudence and Impartiality, think are good ones. For where we ſeem to be moſt at Liberty, we are ſtill bound to make a rational Uſe of that Liberty: and ſhould therefore carefully judge as well as we can; and ſtill be a little diffident, whether we have judged right; not wantonly do whatever we pleaſe, and be confident that we cannot do amiſs, or regardleſs whether we do or not. Scarce any Reaſons ought to exclude our Children: whatever Limitations and Reſtraints may be ſometimes adviſeable. Nor, in Default of Children, ſhould any other than very ſtrong Reaſons exclude thoſe, whom Nearneſs of Blood points out for our Heirs. But then we ſhould be content with allowing as moderate a Prerogative to one of our Poſterity or Kindred, above the reſt, as our Station and Rank, the Conſtitution of our Country, and the eſtabliſhed Maxims of Society will admit: and not

leave all our Family beſides, or any Part of it, in undeſerved Straits and Contempt, for the Vanity of raiſing a ſingle Branch higher than we ought.

Another Caution, often too requiſite, is, that if our Heirs be different from our Succeſſors in any Station or Office of which we are poſſeſſed; or if they, whom we are inclined to favour, be it ever ſo juſtly, are different from our legal Heirs; we ought at no Time, and yet leſs, if poſſible, at our latter End, to do any Thing unequitable, or even unhandſome, for the Advantage of the former, or to expreſs our Diſlike of the latter. Mean Behaviour will ſully our Characters, and generous Behaviour give a Luſtre to them, on theſe Occaſions beyond moſt others. For to act right againſt our own Intereſt, or that of our Favourites, is peculiarly honourable: and to act wrong, when we are juſt going to account for our Actions, is peculiarly ſhocking.

Other Things yet, (ſometimes Duties, and almoſt always Proprieties) belonging to this Part of the Subject, are, Gifts to worthy and uſeful Friends, anſwerable to the Intimacy in which we have lived with them, and to their Occaſions for ſuch Kindneſs: alſo Recom-



pences

pences to Domeſtics in Proportion to their Services compared with the Exigency of their Circumſtances. But however we may be at Liberty in Relation to ſome of theſe Points, we are ſtrictly bound to the Obſervation of another Rule, with Reſpect to all, who are about us in our Sickneſs; of a different Nature indeed from the preceding ones, but which it is much better to mention here, than to omit; that we ſhew them peculiarly at that Time, great Humanity, and Goodneſs: not requiring from them more fatiguing or conſtant Attendance, than is fit; nor more Care, Skill and Dexterity, than is to be expected: recollecting, that our Illneſs inclines us to imagine Things amiſs, in a Degree beyond Reality; and that others ought not to ſuffer merely becauſe we do: thinking often, how diſagreeable an Office they go through, and what Benefit and Comfort we receive from it: begging them to forgive us thoſe haſty Sallies of Fretfulneſs and Impatience, that ſometimes will eſcape us; and making them good Amends in every way that we can, for all the Trouble, which they take about us.

Another Article, uſually conſidered along with ſome, of which I have juſt been ſpeaking,

is

is the Manner of our Funeral. And it may ſometimes be very proper to direct this ourſelves, in order to keep our Friends from the Imprudence of a too expenſive, or the Imputation of a too frugal one. Now we ſhall undoubtedly give a Proof, both of Humility and good Senſe, by avoiding, (unleſs Motives of a public Nature demand it) all Appearance of Oſtentation, at a Time that ſhews the Vanity of worldly Pomp in ſo ſtrong a Light; and appointing that only ſuch Regard be paid to our dead Body, as may expreſs our Faith of its riſing again; together with ſo much Deference to Cuſtom, as may preſerve us from the Charge of a Singularity affected without Reaſon. Nor let it be thought, that Religion hath nothing to do with ſeveral of theſe Matters, which I have now ſpecified. It hath to do with every Matter, where there is a right and a wrong: and *whatſoever Things are venerable, whatſoever Things are lovely and of good Report*, you are to *think on theſe Things*[4]: and that you may, we are to teach them.

But there is another Point, of much greater Importance, expreſly enjoined in the Office for the Sick: that the *Miniſter ſhould not omit ear-*

[4] Phil. iv. 8.

*neſtly*

*neſſly to move ſuch as are of Ability, to be liberal to the Poor.* Our Charity indeed ought to ſhine forth uniformly, and warm thoſe, who need it, through our whole Life: not make a ſudden Blaze, to dazzle the Eyes of others and our own, at the Cloſe of it. What we give in our Health, we give away from ourſelves; and we may know, and the World muſt preſume, that we do it from a willing Heart: whereas delaying it to the laſt hath too much the Look of a ſhallow Deſign to bribe God, and catch the Applauſe of our Fellow-Creatures, with what we can keep no longer. However, they who have always been charitable, ſhould ſtill go on to the End, exerciſing the ſame Virtue: which hath great Promiſes made to it from God in Sickneſs. *Bleſſed is he, that conſidereth the Poor: the Lord will deliver him in Time of Trouble. The Lord will preſerve him, and keep him alive:—The Lord will ſtrengthen him upon the Bed of languiſhing* [s]. They again, who could not give ſo much in their Lives, as they wiſhed, can ſometimes very properly give conſiderably at their Deaths; which doubtleſs God will graciouſly accept: and they who have neglected this Duty careleſly,

[s] Pſ. xli. 1, 2, 3.

or

or even wilfully, had much better, on Conviction, amend late, than never. Therefore all ſhould examine, what is incumbent on them: and ſupply their Deficiencies, if they have been guilty of any. Such as have in no way done much for the Poor, in Proportion to their Circumſtances, may be ſure they have not done enough. Such as imagine they have done them great Good by the Expences of their Luxury and Pride, ſhould think, whether they have not done them, or others, as much or more Harm by the ſame Means. And even they, who have done the moſt real and unmixed Good, ought ſtill, to remember, that they have only been ſo far truly charitable, as Charity was in Truth their inward Motive. Theſe Conſiderations may give many Cauſe to increaſe their Beneficence, under the Attacks of Diſeaſes, or the Decline of Health. But then they muſt carefully avoid all Vainglory in it: elſe our Saviour hath told them, that in *being ſeen of Men they have their* whole *Reward*[f]: nor do they always obtain even the Applauſe, which they ſeek. They muſt likewiſe guard againſt all Conceit of Merit: and look on themſelves not as making a Pre-

[f] Matth. vi. 1, 2.

ſent,

ſent, but as paying a Debt, to God and their Brethren; and that ſo imperfectly, as to be acquitted of Sin only through him, who died to procure Acceptance for their beſt Performances. Whatever is done thus, though it ſhould fail of the Intent, yet exerciſes the true Spirit of Almſgiving as uſefully to us, as if it ſucceeded. But ſtill we ſhould exerciſe it with all the Prudence we can: elſe we may tempt the Objects of our Liberality to Idleneſs or Debauchery; and perhaps the preſent or future Managers of it to Fraud. Yet the Danger of either Abuſe ought to make us, not leſs bountiful, but only more circumſpect; and as early in our Benefactions as poſſible, that we may beſtow or ſettle them in the propereſt Manner, which is very difficult in a Hurry at the laſt.

And here it may be uſeful to obſerve, that beſides the common Charities, to which the preſent Age, with all its Faults, is remarkably well inclined, there are various other ways of doing good. Sometimes a great deal may be done without any Expence; as by making public beneficial Diſcoveries: and the Poſſeſſors of ſuch Secrets are bound in Conſcience not to let them be loſt. Sometimes again,

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what is no particular Charity to any certain Man, may be a great and extenſive Benefit to Mankind: as Foundations for the Study, or Rewards for the Improvement, of Arts or Sciences. And laſtly what may ſeem to contribute nothing to the temporal Advantage of Men, may contribute to it more than any Thing: or were it ever ſo little, may be of unſpeakable Service to what is of infinitely greater Importance, their eternal Happineſs: as Benefactions for the Support, and ſerious and decent Exerciſe, of Religion. If Religion be a Truth, (and conſcientious Preparation for Death plainly confeſſes it is) providing for the Maintenance and Honour of it, muſt be a Duty: and many have been ſo niggardly, ſo unjuſt to it, in the Days of their Health, that they will find they owe it large Compenſations, if they reflect as they ought, in Time of Sickneſs.

But then the utmoſt Care ſhould be taken to avoid all thoſe Errors, by which the improvident Donations of former Ages have brought ſo unhappy a Diſeſteem at preſent on the moſt rational Acts of this Part of Piety: Acts however to be more earneſtly recommended, and more liberally performed by ſuch as do acknowledge

ledge its Value, becauſe ſuch great Numbers do not. Only we muſt never imagine, that the larger Alms or Obligations can purchaſe us either a Licence or a Pardon, (otherwiſe than as all true Marks of Repentance contribute towards the latter) for any Kind of Sin, particularly of Injuſtice. God himſelf hath ſaid: *I the Lord love judgment: I hate Robbery for burnt Offering*[g]. Nor muſt we rob our own Families, more than Strangers, of what they are intitled to. But then they are not intitled to all, that we can poſſibly leave them: but an equitable Share of it is due to religious and charitable Uſes. If indeed we have given a competent Proportion before, and know that they, whom we ſhall leave to repreſent us, if we die, have the ſame Diſpoſition; that may ſuffice. For different Circumſtances require different Methods to be taken. And therefore the Scripture obſerves, that *a good Man will guide his Affairs with Diſcretion*[h]. But one Part of that Diſcretion it hath expreſly declared to be *diſperſing abroad, and giving to the Poor*[i]: which whoever doth in a right Manner, will be likely to obtain a Return of God's Bounties, to his Family, as well as himſelf; in

[g] Iſ. lxi. 8. [h] Pſ. cxii. 5. [i] ver. 9.

their

their temporal Concerns, as well as their ſpiritual, if that be really beſt for them. *His Seed ſhall be mighty upon Earth: the Generation of the Faithful ſhall be bleſſed. Riches and Plenteouſneſs ſhall be in his Houſe: his Righteouſneſs endureth for ever* [k].

[k] Pſ. cxii. 2, 3.

SER-

# SERMON XIII.

ISAIAH xxxviii. 1, 2.

*In thoſe Days was Hezekiah ſick unto Death: and Iſaiah the Prophet, the Son of Amoz, came unto him, and ſaid unto him, Thus ſaith the Lord, Set thine Houſe in Order, for thou ſhalt die, and not live.—Then Hezekiah turned his Face towards the Wall, and prayed unto the Lord.*

IN diſcourſing lately on theſe Words, after reminding you of the Uncertainty of Life and Health, and the Need of preparing for Sickneſs and Death before either of them appears to be at Hand, I propoſed to aſſiſt you in this good Work, by laying before you the Duties of the Sick,

I. Reſpecting their Fellow-creatures.

II. Reſpecting more immediately God and their own Souls.

I. The former, I obſerved to you, are expreſſed in the Text by the Words, *Set thine Houſe in Order*, or, tranſlating more literally, *Give Command concerning*, or, *to thine Houſe*. And this Direction may well be enlarged to comprehend, both due Regulations of all Affairs in which the Sick are intereſted, and proper Advice to all Perſons with whom they are connected. In the firſt of theſe Views I have already treated of it,

And proceed now to the next Point, that of needful Advice to thoſe of our own Family, our Relations and Domeſtics, with whom may well be joined at leaſt our Friends, and thoſe with whom we have lived in Familiarity.

It is a Character, which God gives of *Abraham* with Marks of great Approbation, *I know him, that he will command his Children, and his Houſhold after him, and they ſhall keep the Way of the Lord to do Juſtice and Judgment*[a]. Undoubtedly both he and the other good Patriarchs performed this Duty through their whole Lives, as we ſhould alſo; but we find it recorded of ſeveral of them, and therefore may preſume it of the reſt, that they gave more ſolemn Admonitions to their Families at their

[a] Gen. xviii. 19.

Deaths,

Deaths, in which too our Imitation of them is highly requiſite. For the dying Words, and thoſe which probably may be ſuch, of Parents and Maſters to their Children and Servants, of Friends to their Friends, and of worthy Perſons to ſuch as reſpect them, naturally make an uncommon Impreſſion. The Occaſion is awful; the Minds of the Hearers are uſually tender and affectionate; apt to condemn their former Diſregards, and to receive what is now ſaid, as carrying in it a peculiar Obligation and Sacredneſs: beſides that it may often render forſaking bad Cuſtoms and acting right much the eaſier to them, if they can ſay, (what the World will regard more than a better Reaſon) that ſuch was the dying Injunction of ſuch a Friend.

You will therefore ſurely improve ſuch an Opportunity, as their Proſpect of being deprived of you, though not a certain one, affords you for this excellent Purpoſe. If you have always, or for a conſiderable Time, led a pious Life, you will teſtify to all about you, that you have found it the ſure Way to inward Peace, and that you feel the Faith and Love of God a ſtrong Support in your preſent Hour of Suffering and Trial. If you have been

remiſs and negligent you will excite them, by ſpeaking of the Remorſe which it gives you, to more Care and Zeal. If you have fallen into groſs and public Sins, you will expreſs to them fully a deep Senſe of your Guilt. For be aſſured, that taking Shame to yourſelf thus will be true Honour, both in the Eyes of God and Man. Warn others therefore againſt the Rocks on which you have ſplit, and beſeech them to learn, by your ſad Experience, without wanting to add their own. If they are well diſpoſed and good, give them the Pleaſure of knowing that you rejoice in it; and exhort them to perſevere, with Tokens of a cheerful Confidence that they will. If you diſcern Faults or weak Sides in them, or Dangers to which they will be liable, caution them, not harſhly, but in the kindeſt and moſt perſuaſive Manner, to avoid, for your Sake as well as their own, what you foreſee will elſe prove hurtful, if not fatal to them: and beg of them, that, if they ſhould notwithſtanding go wrong, the Remembrance of your Words may at leaſt, when they find they have, prevail on them to retreat in Time. If you have neglected inſtructing them in eſſential Points, acknowledge it to them with Sorrow, and be

earneſt with them to make themſelves Amends. If you have inſtilled into them, by Diſcourſe or Example, any falſe Notions, whether ſpeculative or practical, labour to ſet them right as completely as you can. But, throughout the whole of your Endeavours, exact no Promiſes from them that may be Snares; lay no Burthen upon them that may prove too heavy; let nothing ſuperſtitious, or any Way unreaſonable, nothing that can be imputed only to the Weakneſs of your Condition, enter into the Charge that you leave with them. Surely I need not add, (if you have any Senſe of Religion) that you are yet leſs to enjoin them, what may gratify Reſentment, perpetuate Variance, or engage them in tranſgreſſing the leaſt of God's Laws. For it would be the vileſt Abuſe of a Death-bed Influence to extort from them, by Means of it, Aſſurances which it muſt be a Sin to give, and a ſtill greater to fulfill.

It frequently happens, that when Men approach very near to their End, they are ill able to exhort even thoſe, who are about them, diſtinctly and properly. But therefore you ſhould be always doing it in a ſufficient Degree, that you may have leſs Need to ſay much

to them at laſt. And when a threatening Sickneſs comes, you ſhould take Occaſions of ſpeaking, before it is gone too far; but rather force yourſelf to ſay a little, though late, than omit it intirely. And be not in the leaſt afraid that then you may happen to expreſs Convictions and good Reſolutions that will not laſt, and urge upon others better Advice than you ſhall follow yourſelves, if you recover; but conſider it as one very weighty Reaſon more for theſe Admonitions, that ſuch a Declaration of your Sentiments will aſſiſt in tying you down to them; and directing their future Behaviour will greatly contribute to ſecure your own. Some indeed are at no Time capable of uſing many Words to Advantage. But perhaps you can uſe a few that ſhall have the Effect of many; at leaſt, you can recommend a valuable Acquaintance, an inſtructive awakening Book, Attendance on public Worſhip, ſerious Recollection from Time to Time, humble Prayer to God in private. If therefore it be poſſible, fail not to make ſome Advantage of what may prove your laſt Opportunity. Think how dreadful it will be, if your Children, your Servants, your Friends, ſhould have Ground to ſay to you in the Day

of

of Judgment, " Had you in your Life taught me any Thing but Sin, and Folly, or Trifles; had you at your Death warned me of my Duty and my Danger, my Condition might have been intirely the Reverſe of what now it muſt be for ever." And, on the contrary, what Delight will it bring you, not only to ſee them happy along with you, but to hear them acknowledge, that you were the Cauſe of it; and to enjoy their Gratitude, as Part of your Reward to all Eternity!

I now proceed to lay before you,

II. The Duties of the Sick, reſpecting more immediately God and their own Souls; to which our Thoughts are naturally turned by the Words, *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord:* for every Sentiment of Piety may be expreſſed in Prayer.

His Prayer indeed, if the whole of it be recorded in Scripture, was only that he might recover; a Requeſt, which for the public Good he had urgent Reaſons to make in the firſt Place. And that being inſtantly granted, he had no Need to apply further to God, in Relation to his Sickneſs, otherwiſe than by Thankſgiving, which he did. But they who have more extenſive Wants at that Time, are

both authorized and bound to enlarge in Proportion the Subject of their Addreſſes to the Throne of Grace; and therefore I ſhall endeavour to comprehend under this Head all the religious Duties of the Sick.

Great Multitudes, in this Nation as well as others, have formerly thought, and too many think ſtill, that they can be acceptable to God by Acts of Devotion, without equitable and kind Behaviour to Men, or virtuous Government of themſelves; which Perſuaſion hath produced an abſurd, uſeleſs, nay, miſchievous Kind of Religion in ſome, and Contempt and even Hatred of all Religion in others. But amongſt us, at preſent, much the largeſt Number build their Hopes of future Happineſs, if they have any, on their Performance, ſuch as it is, of moral Obligations; with little or no Regard, either in their Lives or at their Deaths, to Dictates of Piety, ſcriptural or natural: at leaſt, beyond a few Formalities, negligently practiſed now and then, juſt as they pleaſe. Indeed very many ſeem to fancy, that the Time of Sickneſs is the unfitteſt of all others for attending to ſuch Subjects; that then Perſons ought to think as little as poſſible, and of the moſt inſignificant Things they can. Now, if they

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are but able to keep God out of their Minds when they are ill, it is eaſy to do it when they are well; and ſo all goes on as they wiſh.

But though it be a moſt fatal Miſtake to believe, that every Thing may be done at our latter End, yet it is alſo a very pernicious one to apprehend, that nothing can be done when the Danger of it ſeems to approach. For that Seaſon furniſhes moſt favourable Opportunities for ſuch Reflections and ſuch Behaviour, as will not only produce the happieſt Effects of all Sorts, if we recover, but greatly better our future Condition, if we die. And though in ſome Diſtempers, eſpecially ſome Periods of them, religious Meditations, agitating the Sick very ſtrongly, would only diſorder their Minds, and increaſe the Hazard of their Lives; yet in others they are unſpeakably the ſureſt Relief: and where they do give Uneaſineſs, which they are far from doing always, will ſoon afford, if they are purſued as they ought, moſt valuable Degrees of Comfort and Peace. On all Accounts therefore, he, who hath a Right to our continual and moſt awful Attention in every Part of Life, ought to have it paid him peculiarly in that Part, which reminds us of appearing ſoon before him. Not that it is

our

our Duty in the leaſt to imagine Diſtempers worſe than they are, to lay Streſs on idle Forebodings, or to deſpair of Life, even when juſter Grounds of Apprehenſion appear. For *God, who raiſeth the Dead* [b], can raiſe us from the neareſt Approach to Death, whenever he will. But yet every Indiſpoſition is a Call from Heaven, and ſome are very loud ones, to think of Mortality; and to *remember* him, who ſhould never be forgot, *our Creator* [c], from whom we come, and to whom we ſhall return.

Now the firſt Principle of all Regard to God is Faith. And it would be well if many, who are far from ſuſpecting themſelves of any Tendency towards Atheiſm, would ſeriouſly aſk their Hearts, what Proof they give of having in Earneſt ſo much as the Faith of natural Religion; whether they have conſidered themſelves as under the Obligation of paying conſcientiouſly to their Maker the Obedience and the Worſhip, which Reaſon requires. But ſuppoſing they have; Reaſon ſhews to Sinners, (and we are all ſuch) what they have to do, but in Part: and what they have to hope or fear, ſo very imperfectly, that, however Men may

[b] 2 Cor. i. 9. [c] Eccl. xii. 1.

perſuade

perſuade themſelves to think otherwiſe in the Days of high Spirits and preſumptuous Imaginations; yet, when Sickneſs brings their future Account near to their View, they will find, that nothing could have directed them ſo rightly through Life as God's written Law; and nothing can ſupport them under the Terrors of Death, like that Covenant-right to Pardon and eternal Happineſs, which is there alone offered to Mankind; and even there, on this Condition alone, that they truſt, not in their own Righteouſneſs, not in their own Repentance, not in their own Endeavours, not in their own Amendment, for God's Acceptance, but intirely in his Mercy through the Merits of Jeſus Chriſt; and ſo truſt in that, as thankfully to yield themſelves up to the Influences of his bleſſed Spirit, and in this Strength to labour after that univerſal *Holineſs* of Life and Heart, *without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord*[d]. Therefore convince yourſelf without Delay of the Truth and Importance of this gracious Covenant, which, to a thoughtful humble Mind will ſoon be viſible; and if you are convinced, intitle yourſelf without Delay to a Share in it, and watchfully preſerve this

[d] Heb. xii. 14.

Founda-

Foundation from being at any Time undermined; that in Health and Proſperity you may ſtand firm againſt worldly Allurements, and in Sickneſs and Adverſity againſt Deſpondence.

There are indeed very good Perſons, who, in Illneſſes, particularly of ſome Sorts, are often tempted to partial, or even total Unbelief. And if any ſeeming Reaſons for it be ſuggeſted to their Minds, they ought to inquire after, and oppoſe to them reaſonable Anſwers. But where little or nothing lies at the Bottom but low-ſpirited Fears that they do not believe at all, or not ſufficiently, what their very Solicicitude, and their whole Conduct ſhews they do; or Difficulties about abſtruſe Points, that need not be cleared up, and perhaps, in this World at leaſt, never will or can: the right Way is, to throw them all aſide as far as we are able; to pray to God, that he would free us from Anxiety about them in his good Time; to be diſturbed the leaſt that is poſſible for us, if the ſame Scruples and Weakneſſes, after ſome Interval, return, which they are very apt to do; and, with the Strength that we have remaining, ſtand by the Judgments made in our better Days: which, if we have been ſerious and conſiderate, are much the likelieſt

to

to be true, and being on the Side of Religion, muſt be ſafe; for we may gain by it infinitely, but loſe we cannot. And amongſt the Doctrines of Religion we ſhould not perplex our Heads with diſputable Matters, when we are leaſt of all fit for them, but dwell on ſuch plain acknowledged Points, as may beſt afford us the Direction or Comfort which we want in our preſent Circumſtances.

Being ſettled thus on the Ground-work of Faith, our next Concern will be to examine the Suitableneſs of our paſt Behaviour to it. Self-examination is a conſtant Duty, but eſpecially requiſite when we have the moſt immediate Need to know and amend our Condition; beſides that poſſibly it may diſcover to us ſome Fault of ours, for which the Hand of God is laid upon us, and ſo enable us to obtain the Removal of it. An Inquiry, which will ſhew the beſt of Men but too much amiſs in them, will doubtleſs be to moſt a painful Employment; above all, when they have Sufferings enough to bear, beſides that of a *wounded Spirit*[c]. And why then ſhould we not lighten this Burthen beforehand, by avoiding to act wrong, which is the only ſure Way; or,

[c] Prov. xviii. 14.

which

which is the next, by rectifying it inſtantly? But whatever we have made neceſſary, we muſt ſupport; and being awakened to preſent Remorſe, is unſpeakably better than going on in a Dream to future Miſery. Directions for making this Inquiry muſt be learnt from the Diſcourſes that profeſſedly treat of it. But the chief are theſe: to compare the whole of our Actions, Words and Thoughts, as well as we are able, with the Rule of our Duty, conſcientiouſly, and yet coolly; neither accuſing ourſelves of what we have not done amiſs, nor ſuppreſſing what we have; neither diſturbing our own Peace on Account of mere Infirmities, nor diſguiſing wilful Sins under gentle Appellations; remembering, that God is merciful and good, yet remembering alſo, that he is juſt and holy; reflecting, that we are in his Preſence, and praying, that he would make us known to ourſelves.

After diſcovering thus how we have been guilty, we muſt examine alſo how far we have repented. Now Repentance implies Diſapprobation of what we have done ill, and conſequently Sorrow for it; without which inward Change, an outward Alteration of our Conduct will avail us nothing. But whether the

the Concern, even of great Sinners, be vehement and paſſionate, or ſilent and compoſed, is of ſmall Moment, provided it be real and deep. Sorrow, that we have acted contrary to our Intereſt, is a rational Principle; that we have tranſgreſſed the Rule of Morals, is a virtuous one; that we have diſobeyed our Heavenly Father, is a religious one. And whoever is truly moved by all theſe Conſiderations, it will be an uſeleſs and a hurtful Nicety for him to diſquiet himſelf about the Proportion in which they are mixed, if together they do but produce the proper Effect. And this Effect may and will be different in different Caſes. Our Concern for mere Frailties, if it make us humble and watchful, will be accepted, though it doth not prevent ſome Relapſes into the ſame Failings. But our Penitence for groſs and deliberate Sins muſt evidence itſelf by forſaking them, elſe it hath no Claim to Pardon. And indeed the Repentance, encouraged by ſo many noble Promiſes in the New Teſtament, is that which accompanied the Converſion of Jews and Heathens to Chriſtianity; but the Remiſſion of wilful Offences, committed after profeſſing it, (and we have profeſſed it from our Childhood) will

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be found very ſparingly mentioned. For it is expected of Chriſtians to keep the Laws of Chriſt, elſe they *receive his Grace in vain*[f]. However, there are, God be thanked, Aſſurances of Mercy given to the worſt of us, on returning from our Tranſgreſſions. But none are given to Sorrow without Amendment. If any were, the whole Intent of the Goſpel would be defeated, and *Chriſt* be made the *Miniſter of Sin*[g].

We muſt not therefore imagine, that a little, or a great deal of Grief in Sickneſs, if we could be ſure of feeling it then, which we cannot, will intitle us to Forgiveneſs. For the bittereſt of ſuch Anguiſh may have neither Piety nor Virtue in it, but be merely the Concern of a Malefactor, (continuing in his Heart as much ſo as ever) that he is likely to be puniſhed for his Deeds. Or ſuppoſe there be ſome Convictions of a better Kind, grounded even on Chriſtian Faith; yet when there is no Time for trying what Fruits they will bring forth, and when Multitudes, after the like Convictions, have immediately or ſoon relapſed into their old Iniquities, what Dependance can there be upon them? God indeed knows,

[f] 2 Cor. vi. 9 [g] Gal. ii. 17.

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if they would, in caſe of Recovery, be effectual; but he who feels them hath no Means of knowing it. And were he certain that they would, how doth it appear, that when they come ſo late, they will be accepted? The penitent Thief, whoſe Pardon is the chief Argument alledged to prove this Point, might poſſibly repent long before he was taken, might be taken long before he was executed, might have no Knowledge of the Goſpel, till he hung with our Saviour upon the Croſs; and he exerciſed there a Faith ſo circumſtanced, as ours cannot be: on all which Accounts there in no Room for a Parallel to be drawn between him and wicked Chriſtians now, who continue obdurate till the Approach of Death.

And what ſhall we ſay then concerning them? The mild Spirit of our Religion will not permit us to judge harſhly of them; Faithfulneſs to the Souls of Men will not ſuffer us to pronounce in their Favour. All we can determine with Certainty therefore is, that ſuch Repentance as they ſtill remain capable of, united with Chriſtian Faith, is the beſt and only Thing to which they can have Recourſe. Right Behaviour then will certainly make their Caſe in ſome Degree better; and wrong Be-

haviour, even then, when every Thing conſpires to remind them of what they ought to have remembered ſooner, muſt make it unſpeakably worſe. Their Duty therefore is clear, be their Hopes ever ſo doubtful; and there is always Room for ſome Hope whilſt Life is preſerved. They may have more Time, they may have more Mercy granted them, than they can ſee Cauſe to expect. God is not, even in their Caſe, a cruel Being enraged, but a wiſe and good one juſtly diſpleaſed. Frightening themſelves beyond a Capacity of thinking and acting reaſonably muſt do Harm, be their ſpiritual Condition ever ſo dangerous. They cannot know it to be deſperate, and therefore ought by no Means to give it up. Still, on the other Hand, though God may aſſure them internally of Pardon and Happineſs, yet in general very ſtrong Perſuaſions of that Kind, in ſuch Circumſtances, are greatly to be ſuſpected as enthuſiaſtic, deluſive Imaginations: and the modeſter and leſs confident Men are, the better grounded is their Proſpect. But ſo extremely uncomfortable a one will it ordinarily prove, that there is great Weight in the Son of *Sirach*'s Precept: *Before Judgment examine thyſelf, and in the Day of Viſitation thou*

*ſhalt find Mercy. Humble thyſelf before thou be ſick: in the Time of Sins ſhew Repentance—and defer not until Death to be juſtified* [h].

The Penitence, left to a Bed of Languiſhing, ought to be only the more ſolemn Completion of that which we practiſed daily in our Health. And moſt of us have ſo much to rectify, and all have ſo much Need to do it well, be it more or leſs, that we ſhould not fail to take the earlieſt and ſureſt Time for it; when it will be moſt acceptable to God, and moſt advantageous to our own Souls; when there will be leaſt Ground for Doubt and Scruple afterwards, whether we left our Sins, or they left us; whether we acted on ingenuous, or ſervile Motives. But whatever we have unhappily omitted till Sickneſs calls, let us then at leaſt ſet about it inſtantly; not be aſhamed of repenting, or being known to repent, for it is in ſinning that the only Shame lies; not be ſatisfied with feeling, and owning to Men a Senſe of our Guilt, as far as it relates to them; but confeſs to God our Diſobedience and Ingratitude to him, with the deeper Contrition, the longer we have neglected it. *Hezekiah*'s Prayer indeed hath no Confeſſion of Sin, but

[h] Ecclus xviii. 20, 21, 22.

his Thankſgiving afterwards hath a very ſtrong one: *Thou haſt caſt all my Sins behind thy Back*[i]. And therefore, when he pleaded at firſt, *Remember, O Lord, I beſeech thee, how I have walked before thee with a perfect Heart, and done that which is good in thy Sight*[k], we ſhould underſtand him to mean, that as a King he had been zealous for God's true Religion, to which conſequently his Life was of Importance; not that as a Man he had not deſerved Death, which all Men have. And if we are convinced in any due Degree what our Deſerts have been, we ſhall intreat the Divine Mercy, not for the Merits, I ſaid it before, and I ſay it again, not for the Merits of our good Actions, for the beſt of them are faulty; not for the Sake of our Repentance, which in Strictneſs undoes nothing that we have done amiſs, and therefore (though our natural Power extends no further) cannot intitle us even to Exemption from Puniſhment, much leſs to eternal Rewards; but ſolely through his Satisfaction and Interceſſion, who died to obtain both for us.

A juſt Senſe of this invaluable Bleſſing will effectually incline us to join with our thankful

[i] Iſ. xxxviii. 17. [k] Ver. 3.

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Humiliations, a zealous Performance of whatever Duties are oppoſite to our paſt Sins, and whatever Mortifications are proper to correct our preſent evil Tendencies. But no uſeleſs and fanciful Obſervances, nor any Auſterities, calculated only to give Uneaſineſs for the Sake of giving it, ſhould ever enter into a Chriſtian's Penitence. For ſuch Things take off the Attention from real Obligations, and fix it on themſelves, as Matters of the greateſt Moment: whence the punctual Performers of them are tempted to ſpiritual Pride; and others, who ſee this great Streſs laid on them, are induced either to eſteem them without Cauſe, or to diſeſteem Religion, falſely ſuppoſing it to enjoin them. Therefore the Scripture directs returning Offenders neither to empty Forms, nor to the Rigours of corporal Diſcipline, any farther than to ſuch occaſional Uſe of Faſting, as may be found beneficial, but *to do juſtly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with their God*[1]. And leaſt of all ſhould the Sick be harraſſed with needleſs Burthens. For they have one already, of no ſmall Weight, laid on them by God himſelf; I mean the Diſeaſe which he hath inflicted, and bearing that as

[1] Mic. vi. 8.

they ought, will seldom fail to be Labour sufficient.

Merely feeling the Pressure of it indeed will do us no Service, without attending properly to him from whom it comes. On the contrary, when God saith, *In vain have I smitten your Children, they received no Correction*[m], it implies, that they were hardened in Wickedness; whereas, when *the Voice of the Lord crieth, the Man of Wisdom will hear the Rod, and who hath appointed it*[n]. Yet still worse would it be, if, perceiving whence our Sufferings proceed, we should be wrongly affected towards the Author of them; either with their blasphemous Vehemence, of whom the Scripture foretels, *They shall fret themselves, and curse their God, and look upwards*[o]; or with his profane Despondency, who said, *This Evil is from the Lord, why should I wait for the Lord any longer*[p]? But if we apply to him with humble Confession, and sincere Amendment, like *Ephraim* in *Jeremiah*, *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised; after I was instructed, I smote upon my Thigh, I was ashamed, yea, even confounded*[q]: we shall have Cause to say with

[m] Jer. ii. 30. [n] Mic. vi. 9. [o] Is. viii. 21. [p] 2 Kings vi. 33. [q] Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

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the Pſalmiſt, *It is good for me that I have been in Trouble, that I might learn thy Statutes*[t]. We ſhould learn our Duty from God's Mercies, but if theſe make us forget him, Chaſtiſement is fitly employed to make us recollect him. *I will cauſe you to paſs under the Rod, and bring you into the Bond of the Covenant;—and ye ſhall remember your Ways, and all your Doings, wherein ye have been defiled:—and ye ſhall loath yourſelves in your own Sight, and know, that I am the Lord*[u]. *By this ſhall the Iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the Fruit to take away his Sins*[x]. When therefore God *hideth his Face* from us, and *we are troubled*[y] with Uneaſineſs of Body or Mind, though it may be only *to make* us, like *the Captain of our Salvation, perfect through Sufferings*[w]; yet we ſhall do well to inquire with Humility, though not with cauſeleſs Terror, whether his Purpoſe is not what the Prophet declares in his Name: *I will go, and return to my Place, till they acknowledge their Offence;—in their Affliction they will ſeek me early*[z]. If on Self-examination we find little or nothing but common Frailties to charge upon ourſelves, we ſhall have abundant Reaſon

[t] Pſ. cxix. 71. [u] Ezek. xx. 37, 43, 44. [x] Iſ. xxvii 9.
[y] Pſ. civ. 29. [w] Heb. ii. 10. [z] Hoſ. v. 15.

to rejoice in all our Tribulations, and be thankful to his preventing Grace. If we diſcover groſſer Failings, our Concern is, to anſwer the Divine Expectation, as the next Verſe directs: *Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath ſmitten, and he will bind us up* [y]. Such Behaviour will procure us the Removal, or Mitigation of our Sufferings at preſent, if infinite Wiſdom ſees it beſt for us. But however this be, it will certainly obtain for us that future Recompence of everlaſting Felicity, which the Words, that follow there, naturally expreſs, perhaps with an Alluſion to the Time of our Lord's Reſurrection, the Foundation and Firſt-fruits of the general one: *After two Days will he revive us, in the third Day he will raiſe us up, and we ſhall live in his Sight* [z].

[y] Hoſ. vi. 1 [z] Ver. 2.

SER-

# SERMON XIV.

ISAIAH xxxviii. 1, 2.

*In thoſe Days was Hezekiah ſick unto Death: and Iſaiah the Prophet, the Son of Amoz, came unto him, and ſaid unto him: Thus ſaith the Lord, ſet thine Houſe in Order; for thou ſhalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his Face towards the Wall, and prayed unto the Lord.*

FROM theſe Words I have propoſed to ſhew you the Duties of Sick Perſons.

I. Reſpecting their Fellow-Creatures; expreſſed by the Direction, *ſet thine Houſe in Order:*

II. Reſpecting more immediately God and their own Souls; intimated in the good King's Behaviour, *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord.*

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The former of theſe I have finiſhed, and made ſome Progreſs in the latter: under which, after ſetting before you, in general, the Neceſſity of having Regard to God in our Sickneſs; I proceeded to the particular Obligations, firſt of Faith in his Word (giving at the ſame time Directions to thoſe, who are diſquieted by Doubts and Scruples); then of Self-examination in his Preſence; then of ſuch Repentance, as our Caſe requires. And here I inſiſted largely on the Danger of truſting to a Death-bed Sorrow; and yet the Uſefulneſs of feeling and expreſſing then, rather than never, a due Concern for our paſt Sins: which, I obſerved to you, muſt always be accompanied with earneſt Petitions for Pardon, offered up in the Name of our bleſſed Redeemer; and for Aſſiſtance from the Grace of the holy Spirit; with rational and ſcriptural, not ſuperſtitious, Proofs of our Humiliation; and a hearty Deſire to amend and improve under the Diſcipline of Heaven.

I now go on to remind you farther, that together with theſe, the Sick ought to be very conſtant in every other Exerciſe of private Piety. For as they are cut off from active Life, they have more Leiſure for religious Con-

Contemplation. And as they want all the Improvement and Comfort, which they can have; ſo they will receive the moſt of both, by frequent lifting up of their Hearts to *the God of Patience and Conſolation* [a], the Giver of all Good, in Addreſſes carefully ſuited to their preſent Condition. But uſually, if not always, the right Manner of doing this will be, not to ſet yourſelves Taſks of reading, or meditating, or praying, juſt ſo often, or ſo long; but to obſerve with Impartiality and Diſcretion, what really edifies, and what only flattens you; as alſo, what your Strength and Spirits will permit, without ſuffering by it. And if there be Need, you ſhould allow other Perſons of Skill and Serioufneſs to judge for you in this Matter; following their Deciſions with ſome Degree of implicit Obedience. And ſhould it prove, that with your beſt Management you can neither pray to God, nor think of him, with any Thing near the Affection and Fervency, which you find expreſſed in many good Books, and ſhewn by many good Chriſtians, when ſick; but in a poor, imperfect, broken, languid Manner: bear with yourſelves for what you cannot help; and be aſſured, that

[a] Rom. xv. 5.

your

your heavenly Father will bear with you, and will accept the Service of which your Weakneſs is capable, be it ever ſo ſmall.

Nay further, ſhould your Condition be ſuch as to require a conſiderable Share of your Hours to be ſpent in a thoughtleſs trifling Way; ſubmit to it, as Part of your Duty; and do it without Scruple. Were you indeed to make Amuſements your Choice, as the Means of baniſhing ſerious Thought, that would be a great and dangerous Sin. To throw away the Time of Sickneſs after throwing away that of Health; and imagine it too ſoon for you to think of Religion, while you are well; and too much for you, when you are ill: is a Method, which muſt end unhappily. But in the neceſſary Intervals of Attention to better Things; when, if you were not to ſpend your Hours thus, you would ſpend them worſe; when your Spirits would ſink, and your Patience wear out: then, cheerful Diſcourſes, or any Relaxations, that are innocent, that will revive no wrong Impreſſions, and excite no blameable Movements of Mind, may be very uſeful: provided, that if you have indulged them too much before, you firmly bind yourſelves now to be wiſer for the future, if God con-

continue your Life; and that you give Earneſt of it, by employing no more of your Time thus, than is requiſite, in order to employ the reſt better. For *miſerable Comforters* [b] are theſe Things alone: and wretched Creatures they, who have no other to depend on. Whatever ſuperficial palliative Remedies it may be needful to intermix, the fundamental Support of a pious Mind will ever be that of the Pſalmiſt: *Why art thou ſo heavy, O my Soul; and why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? O put thy Truſt in God* [c].

The Cauſes of Dejection in Sickneſs are of many Sorts: but Religion hath a perfect Cure, if ſuitably applied, for every one of them, as will appear by going through the chief.

Some have ſo painful a Conviction of their own Guilt, though perhaps by no Means uncommonly great, that they fear it can never obtain Pardon. Yet, by the Influence of God's Grace, they have quitted the more wilful of their Sins long ago, and watch againſt the reſt with conſtant Care: they have the firmeſt Belief in general of God's Love to Mankind through Chriſt, and in their more compoſed Hours receive much Comfort from their own

[b] Job xvi. 2. [c] Pſ. xliii. 5, 6.

happy

happy Change. But ſtill at other Times, and eſpecially when they think of their End, as probably approaching, their Hopes are depreſſed by a Load of Terrors, and tormenting Apprehenſions, that they are not qualified *to find Mercy of the Lord in that Day*[d]. Indeed they rather conceive, that more advantageous Thoughts of their Condition would be preſumptuous, and increaſe their Condemnation. But certainly it is no Part of our Duty at all, to think worſe of ourſelves than the Truth; but a Fault, to be *ſwallowed up with overmuch Sorrow*[e], when our heavenly Father invites us to Thankfulneſs and Joy; as doubtleſs he doth every one, who repents, believes and obeys. In that Caſe therefore, queſtioning whether his Goodneſs extends to us, is doing it an Injury. And often theſe very Perſons are ſenſible of this; but miſled by it into a ſecond Error. They firſt imagine their Tranſgreſſions cannot be forgiven; then have Scruples, whether this Imagination can be forgiven: and thus are miſerable ſucceſſively on each Account, whereas they need not be ſo on either. For their Diſtruſt is involuntary, mere Infirmity: which God will never impute to them, if they

[d] 2 Tim. i. 18. [e] 2 Cor. ii. 7.

confeſs

confeſs it to him, and ſtrive againſt it as well as they can; but will hear their Prayers, and grant them Relief in his good Time.

Others are perſuaded, that their Sickneſs is a Judgment, inflicted on them for this or that particular Fault; and they cannot bear the Weight of the Almighty's Anger. But perhaps his Intent is, not to puniſh, but to warn and preſerve, or merely to try, and to improve you. *For whom the Lord loveth, he chaſteneth: and ſcourgeth every Son, whom he receiveth*[f]. Or if he is diſpleaſed, would not letting you go on unchecked have been a far more dreadful Judgment? He now calls you to repent, and amend: and when you have done that, he may take off his Hand. Or ſhould he extend his Correction even *to the Deſtruction of the Fleſh*, yet by the very Means of that wholeſome Severity, your *Spirit may be ſaved in the Day of the Lord Jeſus*[g]. Since therefore you have happily avoided the common Extreme, of *deſpiſing the chaſtening of the Lord*, avoid but alſo the other, of *fainting when you are rebuked of him*[h], and all will be well.

Some again, upon whom Infirmities continue long, make heavy Complaints, that they

[f] Heb. xii. 6. [g] 1 Cor. v. 5. [h] Heb. xii. 5.

are

are become uſeleſs and good for nothing. But what Need have you to be good for more, than your Maker ſees proper? If it be his Will to make you of little Uſe, is there not great Dutifulneſs, and therefore great Reward, in ſubmitting to it? Yet, after all, may not you be of excellent Uſe, by the Example of ſuffering piouſly and cheerfully; and by ſhewing the World, that Religion can enable you to give up every Thing elſe? But you had Deſigns, it may be, of doing much good; and ſhall leave them abortive or imperfect. Why, God will accept your Intention, and complete your Deſigns in his own Time and Way; poſſibly ſtill by your Hands, notwithſtanding Appearances. But you are unable, in your preſent Condition, to make any Proviſion for your Family; perhaps are a Burthen to it: and during your Illneſs, or after your Death, they that belong to you will be deſtitute. Why, if this Danger have ariſen from any paſt Neglect of yours, you have Cauſe to be concerned for it; yet no more Cauſe to ſink under it, than under your other Faults: and may humbly hope, that God will be good to your Relations and Dependents, though you have been deficient. But if you could not help what hath happened, or is

likely to happen; commit them cheerfully to him, as you do yourſelves; and take Comfort from his own Words: *Leave thy Fatherleſs Children; I will preſerve them alive: and let thy Widows truſt in me*[i]. All this while, you have been only his Inſtrument in ſupporting them: when he lays you aſide, he will make Uſe of ſome other. And though you may not in the leaſt foreſee particularly, what will become of them; yet you well know in general, and let this ſuffice you, that *a Father of the Fatherleſs, and a Judge of the Widows, is God in his Holy Habitation*[k]. Pray for them therefore earneſtly, and take all prudent worldly Meaſures on their Behalf; but never be anxious about them. And yet, if you cannot avoid being a little ſo, remember, that ſome ſmall Exceſs of kind and laudable Affection is an amiable Failing; and ſome Defect of Faith in trying Circumſtances hath often been chargeable on very ſincerely pious Men.

But farther: to many, who are young, it is a heavy Grief in their Sickneſs, that far from being bleſſed with Length of Days, they are likely to be cut off in their early Years, without approaching to what they had conſidered

[i] Jer. xlix. 11. [k] Pſ. lxviii. 5.

as the common Term of human Life. But frequently such Persons regain by Degrees a comfortable State of Health, and outlast a great Part of their Contemporaries. Or suppose they do not: very few in Proportion arrive at old Age; and perhaps one Half of Mankind leave the World before they attain their full Growth. God knew best, when it was fit you should come into Life: and he knows best also, when and how it is fit you should go out of it. If you are not ready for a Change, it is your own Fault: you must endeavour to become so, as soon and as well as you can; and others must take Warning by you. But if you are prepared, how happy is your Case, as the Book of *Wisdom* describes it! *He pleased God, and was beloved of him: so that, living amongst Sinners, he was translated; yea, speedily was he taken away, lest Wickedness should alter his Understanding, or Deceit beguile his Soul*[1]. How you would use a longer Space, or what would befall you in it, you cannot possibly tell: but there have been such Multitudes, to whom dying in their Prime would have been the greatest Felicity, with Respect to this World and the next; that if he, who sees all

[1] Wisd. iv. 10, 11.

Things,

Things, ſees proper to appoint it for any of us; we have abundant Cauſe to lay down our Heads quietly, without murmuring.

Still, the Deſire of Life is natural; and, if tempered with due Submiſſion, always innocent, ſometimes highly virtuous: for it may be ſtrengthened by Reaſons, private or public, of great Moment. And doubtleſs for ſuch it was, that ſo much of *Hezekiah*'s Prayer, as the Scripture mentions, was plainly intended to plead for his being ſpared. God may bring us into Danger, only to give us, what we commonly want, a ſtronger Senſe of our Dependence on him: and this End being obtained, he may continue us here, to do him the Service, for which he hath thus qualified us. But when it appears a determined Call to us, to *ariſe and depart*[m]; however *weak the Fleſh* may be, let the *Spirit* be *willing*[n], and ſay, *I come, to do thy Will, O God*[o]: yet without reckoning a conſiderable Degree of inward Reluctance, if we ſhould feel it, a Sin; or even too great a Degree to be either a heinous Offence, or a bad Sign upon the whole. Our bleſſed Lord himſelf, who choſe to ſuffer every Thing, which might inſtruct us, was probably

[m] Mic. ii. 10. [n] Matth. xxvi. 41. [o] Heb. x. 7.

on that Account not intirely exempt from Dread of Death: but he was intirely obedient under it; and thus furniſhed us with the fulleſt Proof, that Infirmity of Nature is very different from Rebellion of Will, and very conſiſtent with perfect Reſignation. Indeed ſo far as Reaſon can influence, the virtuous have much more Reaſon of the two, to fear Life, than Death. The former is beſet round with Afflictions and Hazards: the Terrors of going through the latter depend, in a great Meaſure, to all Appearance, on Imagination. This World, we are ſure, hath little Good in it: the next hath every Thing, that we can wiſh: why ſhould we be unwilling then to make the Exchange? At the Hour of our Departure we are ſtill in the ſame Hands, in which we have always been. And therefore ſhould we not ſay, from the Bottom of our Hearts: *Though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no Evil: for thou art with me*[p]?

But ſome are not ſo much afraid of dying, as of the painful and weariſome Road, that leads to it. They have ſuffered already, they think, nearly, if not quite, to the full Extent of their Patience: yet a great deal more Suffering muſt

[p] Pſ. xxiii. 4.

come;

come; and they ſhall never ſupport it. But remember; Thouſands and Millions, and amongſt them, thoſe of the quickeſt Senſibility and moſt timorous Diſpoſitions, have born before you as much as you can have to bear: nay, perhaps you have born yourſelf much more, than remains behind. The ſame Help from above, that enabled you to ſupport Yeſterday, will enable you to ſupport To-day and To-morrow. And in fact, we all of us bear Things very well, which yet we call intolerable; and commonly go through ſeverer and more tedious Sufferings with as firm and calm a Spirit, as we do lighter and ſhorter. At leaſt therefore make not yourſelf miſerable before-hand, by drawing frightful Pictures of what may never come; or however may fall greatly ſhort of what you imagine. And let the worſt come; pray to God, and *look unto Jeſus, who endured the Croſs*[q]; then ſet yourſelf to bear what you can; and you will find, that you can bear what you need. Pain, when moderate, is nothing terrible; and when acute, is ſeldom long. If you recover, you will ſoon forget all, or think and talk of it with Pleaſure: and if you die; that, to a good

[q] Heb. xii. 2.

Perſon, is the completeſt Recovery, that is poſſible. In all Events therefore be compoſed: and to aſſiſt yourſelf in it, avoid, with the utmoſt Caution, all intemperate Words and Behaviour: for indulging them will only exaſperate your Mind; and checking them will quiet it very much. Yet never condemn yourſelf for merely natural Expreſſions of what you feel; (for the moſt pious Men, in Scripture, have uſed very ſtrong ones) nor too rigidly for a little Exceſs in them. A Duty ſo hard, as undergoing ſharp Torments, or continued Wearſomneſs, may well admit of ſome Imperfection in the Performance, and yet intitle us, through our merciful Father's Bounty, to a large Recompence. Nor is it criminal in grievous Agonies, tireſome Confinement, Lowneſs of Spirits, or Weakneſs of Body, that make us Burthens to ourſelves and others, humbly to aſk, when no other Hope of Releaſe appears, (if it be God's Will) for that of Death. Only we muſt do nothing to haſten it; we muſt uſe the Means of preſerving and ſupporting Life ſo long as Nature permits it to laſt: and we muſt not be impatient with Heaven, if that be longer than we wiſh; but meekly ſuffer on, and faithfully maintain our

Poſt, until the appointed Hour, when our great Commander ſhall call us off to Reſt.

But beſides Reſignation in Sickneſs, we owe to God Thankfulneſs alſo; for the numerous other Bleſſings, which we ſtill enjoy; for the Bleſſing of Health, all the Time that we did enjoy it; for every Interval and Alleviation, every Comfort and Support, which he hath given us ſince: for we *are not worthy of the leaſt of all his Mercies*[r]. Nor have we Cauſe to be thankful under Sickneſs only, but thankful for it alſo. Very poſſibly this may ſeem Affectation to ſome, and *a hard Saying*[s] to others. But conſider: are we not often highly thankful, and with great Cauſe, for what produces only Pain to us at the Time; as in the Caſe of any rough Medicine adminiſtred or painful Operation performed upon us, Neceſſity ſo requiring? Now God is the Phyſician of our Souls; and Sickneſs is one of his principal Methods of Cure. By this he deadens our immoderate Fondneſs for Amuſements and Pleaſures; and removes us out of the way of Temptations to Vanity and Folly. By this he lowers the ſwelling Vehemence of haughty Spirits; and teaches hard Hearts by

[r] Gen. xxxii. 10. [s] John vi. 60.

Experience, that Misery deserves Pity. By this he shews us the Emptiness of the present World, the Nearness and Importance of the next: reminds us of Self-Inquiry and Penitence, Meditation and Prayer: tries and exercises our Faith, our Trust, our Patience: gives us the Opportunity of *offering to him what costs us something*[t]; and by employing us in more laborious Work, secures to us a more ample Reward. The harshest Discipline, that is requisite to procure such Benefits as these to us, (and it is only *if Need be*[u], that we are afflicted) surely deserves our utmost Gratitude. The more, and more constantly, our Hearts are filled with it; the better and happier we shall be: but if we can arrive no farther, than to be sensible, that we have Reason for Thankfulness; and to exert accordingly some Acts of it from Time to Time upon Recollection; let it excite no Terror in us, but only Endeavours to improve. Nor should we imagine, that there is the least Inconsistence between Thankfulness for the Good intended us by Sickness, and earnest Desires to feel as little of it, and be treated as gently, as our Case will admit. God indeed knows, what inward Strength we shall

[t] 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. [u] 1 Pet. i. 6.

have:

have: but we only know what our Weakneſs is; and ought therefore to pray, that if it be his good Pleaſure, our Trial may be moderate.

But whatever it be, we muſt join our own Care with his Appointments: elſe all that we go through may be thrown away upon us; and even, in direct Contradiction to his Deſign, hurt us in the future Life, as well as the preſent. This whole Matter is beautifully deſcribed in the Book of *Job*. If *they be bound in Fetters, and holden in Cords of Affliction*; *then he ſheweth them their Work, and their Tranſgreſſions that they have exceeded. He openeth alſo their Ear to Diſcipline, and commandeth that they return from Iniquity. If they obey and ſerve him, they ſhall ſpend their Days in Proſperity, and their Years in Pleaſures.—But the Hypocrites* (or impure) *in Heart heap up Wrath: they cry not, when he bindeth them*[x]. Let us therefore *humble ourſelves under his Hand*[y], whenever he lays it upon us; conſider the great End of all his Corrections, and apply our whole Souls to attain it. Perhaps we ought to have practiſed Retirement and Self-Inſpection during our Health, and would not; but

[x] Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10, 11, 13.

[y] 1 Pet. v. 6.

diſſipated

diſſipated and loſt ourſelves in Purſuits and Cares, or Diverſions and Trifles. To cure us of this, he confines us to a ſick Room, where we muſt be alone and think. Let us then at length do it to good Purpoſe; look back to our Conduct in this World, look forward to our Portion in the next; *remember God on our Bed, and meditate on him in the Night-watches* [z]. *Stand in Awe, and ſin no more; commune with our own Heart in our Chamber, and be ſtill; offer the Sacrifice of Righteouſneſs, and put our Truſt in the Lord* [a].

For the better Performance of theſe and all the Duties of Sickneſs, and obtaining ſuch a Concluſion of it, as may be moſt expedient for us, religious Prudence will direct us to join with our own Prayers thoſe of our Fellow-Chriſtians. To unite us more cloſely in good Will and Affection, our Saviour hath appointed, that our Prayers ſhall be common; and hath declared, that *where we are gathered together* for this Purpoſe, *he is in the Midſt of us* [b]. Accordingly, when St. *Peter* was in Danger, *Prayer was made without ceaſing of the Church unto God for him* [c]. And St. *James*'s Injunction

[z] Pſ. lxiii 6. [a] Pſ. iv. 4, 5. John v. 14. [b] Matth. xviii. 20. [c] Acts xii. 5.

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concerning the Sick is, *pray for one another, that ye may be healed* [d]. Nor certainly ought we to intercede leſs fervently for the Souls of our Brethren, than their Bodies. Therefore in the ancient Liturgies, Perſons dangerouſly ill were recommended by Name to the Throne of Grace for ſuch Mercies as they needed. And our own hath provided, on behalf of *thoſe eſpecially, for whom our Prayers are deſired*, a moſt comprehenſive Requeſt, for *Comfort and Relief according to their ſeveral Neceſſities*, for *Patience under their Sufferings*, for *a happy Iſſue out of all their Afflictions*. And we ſhall conſult both our Duty and our Intereſt, by intreating a particular Share, when our Caſe requires it, in the general Supplications of the Church of Chriſt.

But then, if it pleaſes God to reſtore us, we muſt, as we have taken every Method of procuring his Mercy, take every Method of acknowledging it. And one is, by ſuitable Acts of Devotion. Sincere and fervent Thankſgivings at the Time are indiſpenſably neceſſary: and ſtated Returns of them, for more remarkable Deliverances, are very becoming and beneficial. But Expreſſions of Gratitude

[d] James v. 16.

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in Words alone, however warm, are nothing. We muſt ſhew it in our whole Behaviour; zealouſly keep alive the good Purpoſes, that we formed in the Time of our Danger; freely own them; ſacredly execute them; always remembering, that the moſt perfect Recovery is but a ſhort Reprieve: elſe our former Sins, and more, will *enter* into our Souls, *and dwell there*; *and our laſt State be worſe than our firſt* [e], like that of innumerable poor Wretches, who are gone into Eternity before us: whereas if we *pay our Vows, which we promiſed with our Lips, and ſpake with our Mouths, when we were in Trouble* [f]; *our chaſtening* ſhall *yield us* here *the peaceable Fruit of Righteouſneſs* [g]; and *our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, work for us an eternal Weight of Glory* [h].

Thus I have gone through a large Number of Directions to the Sick. But there is no ſmall Danger, that when you are called to the Practice of them, ſome may be forgotten, ſome miſapplied, and others found ſo ſhort and imperfect, that perplexing Difficulties how you are to act, or melancholy Doubts what you are to think of your Condition, may

[e] Matth. xii. 45. [f] Pſ. lxvi. 12. [g] Heb. xii. 11. [h] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

remain.

remain. Now in theſe Caſes it is natural to aſk the Opinion of ſerious and prudent Friends. The more ſuch you have, and the more good Uſe you make of them, the better. But at leaſt the Miniſters of the Goſpel are bound to be ſuch to you, as far as they are able, whenever you apply to them. Not only the general Nature of our Office demands it; but we have all made a particular ſolemn Promiſe, *to uſe both public and private Monitions and Exhortations, as well as to the Sick as to the whole, within our Cures, as Need ſhall require, and Occaſion ſhall be given*[1]. Still we would obtrude ourſelves on no one: but we muſt ſignify to you our Readineſs to perform this Promiſe; and indeed our Apprehenſions, that you are often Loſers, by not claiming it. What we ſay to you here, paſſes with too many for Words of Courſe, to entertain you for the preſent half Hour, and be thought of no more. At your own Homes, when you are well, you expect to ſee us only on the ſame Footing with other Viſitors: and when you are ſick, you are unwilling to ſee us at all. Surely we might be of more Service to you, if you would admit us; and particularly we might be ſo in your more

[1] Office of ordaining Prieſts.

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conſiderable, eſpecially in your more laſting Illneſs; when for a long Time together *you are ſhut up, and cannot go into the Houſe of the Lord*[k]. We hope you have no Reaſon to fear, that we ſhall either artfully *make a Gain of you*[l], or otherwiſe intermeddle in your worldly Affairs; or indiſcreetly augment your Danger by tiring or terrifying you. But if we can preſerve you from either vainly terrifying, or fatally deceiving yourſelves; can inform, or but remind you, of any Part of your Duty; or merely aſſiſt your Patience, and enliven your Hope: both you and we ſhall have Cauſe to rejoice.

Doubtleſs not a few of you can think of every Thing that is proper on ſuch Occaſions, both in your own Caſe and that of others, better than we can ſuggeſt it to you. And *would God, that all the Lord's People were Prophets*[m]; able to officiate thus to themſelves, and thoſe around them. But many are not: and ſuch as are, would ſurely do well, at fitting Times, were it only for Example's Sake, to obſerve St. *James*'s Rule, which he delivers in general Terms: *Is any ſick among you, let him call for the*

[k] Jer. xxxvi. 5. [l] 2 Cor. xii. 17, 18. [m] Numb. xi. 29.

*Elders*

*Elders of the Church and let them pray over him* [n]: which Prayers were doubtleſs preceded, or followed, by ſuitable Exhortations. It is true, he directs them particularly in order to a miraculous Cure of the Sick; and preſcribes at the ſame Time, *anointing with Oil in the Name of the Lord*, which was uſed in performing ſuch Cures. We will not therefore ſay, that his Injunction is exactly ſuited throughout to the preſent State of Things. But ſtill, though *Gifts of Healing* [o] are ceaſed, and the Ceremony belonging to them is become totally ſuperfluous; it remains notwithſtanding a Chriſtian Duty, *in every Thing, by Prayer and Supplication, with Thankſgiving, to let our Requeſts be made known unto God* [p]: and Petitions for the Sick, both public in the Congregation, and private in their Preſence, may be of great Efficacy, not only to their ſpiritual, but their bodily Health. *For the fervent Prayer of a righteous Man availeth much* [q]. Therefore in all Ages the Elders of the Church have attended them: and our own Church hath both given Directions, and provided an Office for that Purpoſe.

Poſſibly one Part of the Office may ſeem to have aſcribed ſo high a Power to the Miniſter,

[n] James v. 14. [o] 1 Cor. xii. 9, 28, 30. [p] Phil. iv. 6. [q] James v. 16.

of

of abſolving the Sick from their Sins, as may lead them into great Miſtakes. And it is indeed more liable to be ſo miſunderſtood, than the earlier Forms, which were expreſſed in the Manner of a Prayer. But ſtill all Writers on the Subject have agreed, that this Abſolution either was intended (which indeed is moſt probable) only to ſet Perſons free from any eccleſiaſtical Cenſures, which they might have incurred: (an Indulgence, granted in every Age of the Church to ſuch as were dangerouſly ill, on their humble Requeſt; but which is no more pretended to make a Change in their eternal State, than a Pardon from the King is) or, if it means alſo to declare them reſtored to the Favour of God, means it only on Suppoſition of a ſincere and thorough Repentance; which being profeſſed by them, it may be charitably preſumed, though not certainly known, that it is real; and without which, I beg you all to obſerve, no Abſolution here, granted by whomſoever, or in what Words ſoever, will do you the leaſt Good hereafter. Accordingly this Form is not appointed ever to be uſed, but when the Sick have made, by their own Choice, *a ſpecial Confeſſion of ſome weighty Matter, troubling their Conſciences, humbly*

*bly and heartily deſiring*, that it may be uſed for their Conſolation. And as this is but ſeldom requeſted, and conſequently the Abſolution ſeldom pronounced over any one; ſo whenever it is, it may and ought to be accompanied with ſuch Explanations, as will prevent any wrong Conſtructions.

But there ſtill remains to be mentioned, on this Occaſion, another Act of Piety, receiving the holy Communion: which, though not particularly appointed in Scripture for the Sick, hath from the earlieſt Times been recommended to them, and practiſed by them; as a very fit Expreſſion of their thankful Faith in the Merits of Chriſt's Death; their Hope of a future Reſurrection, as Members of his Body; and their being in Charity with every other Member of it, and all Mankind: by the Exerciſe of which Graces in this Manner, they obtain a Title to ſuch Aſſiſtance from above for going happily through their preſent Time of Trial, as muſt needs be highly valuable to every ſerious Mind.

But then, to enjoy the true Benefit of the Ordinances of Chriſt, and the Prayers and Exhortations of his Miniſters, you ſhould deſire them whilſt you are capable of duly attending

to them, and acting upon the Impreſſions made by them; not defer them to the laſt, when they can hardly contribute any Thing either to uſeful Direction, or well-grounded Comfort; and perhaps may only encourage an Imagination, moſt pernicious to the Souls of Men, that a few Formalities, in the Concluſion of Life, will atone for ſpending it ill. If we take Refuge in Religion with a bad Heart unwillingly, it will be of no Service to us: and if we really delight in its Offices, we ſhall have Recourſe to them early; indeed we ſhall live in the Obſervance of them always; only repeating them more frequently, and if poſſible, with more intenſe Application of Mind, as our Need becomes more urgent. For thus our Strength will increaſe with our Burthen: and *when our Fleſh and our Heart faileth, God ſhall be the Strength of our Heart, and our Portion for ever*[r].

[r] Pſ. lxxiii. 26.

SER-

# SERMON XV.

ROM. xiv. 9.

*For to this End Chriſt both died and roſe and revived, that he might be Lord both of the Dead and Living.*

THE public Offices of our Church have led us, within a few Months, through moſt of the principal Tranſactions of our bleſſed Redeemer's Life on Earth. We have commemorated his Condeſcenſion to take upon him *the Likeneſs of ſinful Fleſh* [a], his ſubmitting to *fulfill* the *Righteouſneſs* [b] of the Jewiſh Law, and his early Manifeſtation to the Gentile World; his faſting forty Days and Nights, and yielding afterwards to be *tempted in all Points as we are, yet without Sin* [c]. Many of his wonderful Works, many of his gracious Inſtructions, have been rehearſed in

[a] Rom. viii. 3. [b] Matth. iii. 15. [c] Heb. iv. 15.

our Ears; and very lately his moſt bitter Sufferings and Death repreſented, as it were, before our Eyes. We have accompanied him, from his Sorrows and Agonies in the Garden, through all the ſad Variety of Diſgrace and Pain that he underwent, till *he bowed his Head, and gave up the Ghoſt*[d] on the Croſs. We have ſeen his dead Body pierced to the Heart with a Spear, taken down and interred, the Sepulchre cloſed, ſealed up, and guarded; his Diſciples, though continuing to honour him, quite in Deſpair about him: and yet we find him this Day riſen again, to die no more.

Surely it is Time we ſhould aſk ourſelves what was the Meaning of ſo unparalleled a Tranſaction, to which the Attention of all Mankind hath been called ſo ſolemnly ever ſince? It could not be merely to move our Compaſſion with a piteous Hiſtory, that God ſent his Son from Heaven, to live in Wretchedneſs and die in Torment; nor to fill us with a vain Admiration, that he raiſed him from the Grave, and hath placed him at his own right Hand. What then was the View and Uſe of this moſt extraordinary Diſpenſation? The Text informs us. *To this End Chriſt both died and roſe*

[d] John xix. 30.

*and*

*and revived*; or, as it ſhould be tranſlated, and is elſewhere in the New Teſtament, *lives again, that he might be Lord both of the Dead and the Living*. Every Thing he did or ſuffered was ordained to accompliſh that merciful and awful Scheme of Providence, our Saviour's univerſal Dominion over all; to make the Obedient good and happy, and reward the Diſobedient according to their Works. This important Doctrine I ſhall

I. Explain and prove. Then ſhew,

II. Under what Obligations it lays us.

I. Chriſt indeed, as the eternal Son of the Father, had original Glory and Dominion before the World exiſted; *was in the Beginning with God, and was God*[e]. But the Apoſtle ſpeaks not here of that Dignity and Power which his divine Nature always poſſeſſed, but which his human Nature acquired, by dying and riſing and living again. It is true, the former Part of his Life contributed greatly, both by his Doctrine and Example, to ſet up that Kingdom of Righteouſneſs, over which he was to reign. And even then *the Father had given all Things into his Hand*[f], *and committed*

[e] John i. 1. [f] John iii. 35.

*all Judgment to him* [g]. But this being done in Conſideration of his future Sufferings, on them the Foundation of his Authority is laid in Scripture. Thus St. *Paul* teaches, that, becauſe *being in the Form of God, he was willing to take upon him the Form of a Servant*, an inferior and miniſtering Nature, as ours is; and then, being *found in Faſhion as a Man, humbled himſelf* yet lower *unto the Death of the Croſs: therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name above every Name* [h]. But elſewhere he more determinately grounds his Sovereignty on his Paſſion alone; *We ſee Jeſus, for the ſuffering of Death, crowned with Glory and Honour* [i]. And juſtly doth it intitle him to an Authority over us, ſince it gained him a Property in us. For Sin both ſubjecting Men by its Guilt, as Debtors and Criminals, to the juſt Sentence of God, and by its Dominion, as Captives and Slaves, to the unjuſt Empire of the Devil; our Saviour, by delivering us in each of theſe Reſpects, hath obtained a double Right to us. By giving his Life a Ranſom to Divine Juſtice, he hath bought us to himſelf with the Price of his Blood; ſo that we are his in Right of Purchaſe. And having

[g] John v. 22. [h] Phil. ii. 6—9. [i] Heb. ii. 9.

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deſtroyed the Tyranny of the Wicked One over us, by the Holineſs of the Precepts which his Death confirmed, and the Efficacy of the Grace which it procured, we are his again in Right of Conqueſt.

This Authority, thus acquired, his Reſurrection openly proclaimed; atteſting, not only in general the Truth of his Miſſion, but in particular the Acceptance of his Sufferings for our Redemption: and conſequently his Title to govern us, and his Power to raiſe us up again according to his Promiſe, as he had raiſed himſelf. Hence, during the Remainder of his Continuance on Earth, he founded and gave Laws to his Church; and being yet more ſolemnly inveſted with Fulneſs of Power on his Aſcenſion to Heaven, he ever lives to rule and protect it. Nor doth his Sovereignty extend over Mankind alone, but the whole Creation. For *God*, as St. *Paul* aſſures us, *having raiſed him from the Dead, hath ſet him at his own Right Hand, far above all Principality and Power and Might and Dominion, and every Name that is named, not only in this World, but alſo in that which is to come, and hath put all Things under his Feet*[k]: *that in the Name of Jeſus*, as

[k] Eph. i. 20, 21, 22.

he adds in another Place, *every Knee ſhould bow, of Things in Heaven, and Things in Earth, and Things under the Earth; and every Tongue confeſs, that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord*[l]. In theſe Words he is deſcribed, both as the High-Prieſt and the King of the Univerſe. His Poſſeſſion of the former Office is expreſſed by ſaying, that *every Knee ſhall bow in his Name*; for ſo it ſhould be tranſlated, not *at his Name*, when his Name is mentioned: though that be a Practice, both unexceptionable and reverent. *To bow the Knee* is to pray. So, *Eph.* iii. 14. *For this Cauſe I bow my Knees unto the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that he would grant you to be ſtrengthened by his Spirit in the inner Man.* Therefore to *bow the Knee in the Name of Jeſus*, is to pray in his Name, as the Perſon qualified and appointed to preſent our Petitions to God, and derive his Bleſſings upon us. The remaining Part of the Paſſage declares his Kingly Office: *And every Tongue confeſs, that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord*; or, as St. *John* more emphatically ſtiles him, *Lord of Lords, and King of Kings*[m]. Nor are Men only, but *all the Angels* of God required to *worſhip him*[n] as ſuch. Created Beings, of how

[l] Phil ii. 10, 11. [m] Rev. xvii. 14. [n] Heb. i. 6.

ex-

exalted Rank ſoever, can only be *faithful as Servants in the Houſe of God, but Chriſt as a Son over his Houſe, which himſelf hath builded* [o].

In what Manner he governs the Reſt of his Works we are not concerned to inquire. Men he governs, by giving Laws, which every one, who receives the Knowledge of them, is bound to obey, and no one may add to, diminiſh, or alter; by forming thoſe, who ſubmit to him willingly, into a regular Society, or univerſal Church, provided with fit Means of Inſtruction, Diſcipline, and Grace; by improving them in all Goodneſs, and ſtrengthening them againſt all Temptation; by providing, that in the worſt of Times *the Gates of Hell ſhall not prevail* [p] to aboliſh true Religion; and gradually bringing on, according to his Promiſe, that happy Age, when *the Kingdoms of this World ſhall become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Chriſt, and he ſhall take to himſelf his great Power, and ſhall reign* [q]. But however illuſtrious his Dominion may then appear, the full Manifeſtation of it, (for which every other Act of his regal Authority is opening the Way) will be in that Hour, when he ſhall *come with the holy Angels to ſit upon the Throne of his Glory, and all Na-*

[o] Heb. iii. 3, 5, 6. [p] Matth. xvi. 18. [q] Rev. xi. 15, 17.

*tions*

*tions being gathered before him*[r], ſhall ſentence the Wicked, both Men and Devils, to everlaſting Puniſhment, but beſtow on the Righteous Life eternal. After which, the Ends of this whole Diſpenſation being now accompliſhed, he *ſhall deliver up his Kingdom* of Grace *to God even the Father*[s], in whoſe Kingdom of Glory he *ſhall* ſtill *reign*, with him and the Holy Spirit, over his Saints and Angels, *for ever and ever*[t].

Such is the Sovereignty over all, which the Son of Man, firſt died to acquire; and then riſing again, lives to exerciſe. And as it extends through the whole Creation of God, from the Beginning to the Conſummation of all Things, no Wonder, if the Reaſons and Circumſtances of many Particulars in it be incomprehenſible to us. Notwithſtanding theſe, as the Main of it appears highly worthy of God, and no Part evidently unworthy, we ought to believe the Whole, on the ſtrong and manifold Atteſtations which he hath given us of its Truth. The *preaching of Chriſt crucified* may ſeem *Fooliſhneſs*[u] to the Wiſe in their own Imaginations. But whoever is duly ſen-

[r] Matth. xvi. 27.—xix. 28.—xxv. 31, 32. [s] 1 Cor. xv. 24. [t] Rev. xi. 15. [u] 1 Cor. i. 23.

ſible of his being in a State, where we *know but in part, and ſee* what is neareſt to us *through a Glaſs darkly* [y], will be glad to receive, with implicit Faith, that *Wiſdom of God in a Myſtery, which he hath ordained before the World unto our Glory* [z].

The Foundation of the Chriſtian Scheme, that we are all originally prone to Sin, and actually guilty of it, is but too notorious. Now the Mercy of our heavenly Father, though conſtantly ſhewn in a proper Degree to every proper Object, preſerves not the faulty from daily experiencing dreadful Conſequences of their Faults in this Life, which the ſincereſt Repentance will not ſingly prevent. And who can diſprove, what the New Teſtament affirms, and throughout implies, that we ſhould all have experienced yet worſe Conſequences in the Life to come, had not our bleſſed Redeemer done and ſuffered for us the Things he hath? In general, that one Perſon may, by interpoſing, and even bearing much, on behalf of others, avert from them great Evils, and procure them great Good, we are very ſenſible. And ſuppoſing us ever ſo ignorant what Connexion in particular there is between the Suf-

[y] 1 Cor. xiii. 12. [z] 1 Cor. ii. 7.

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ferings of Chriſt and our own Salvation; we have no more Cauſe to complain, than that we cannot learn, by what Steps a Friend hath delivered us from worldly Danger, or by what Efficacy a Medicine hath reſtored our Health. All that we are concerned in, all that we are to believe and do, we are plainly told. And if we are not told, what God alone is concerned in, the Reaſons of his own Counſels; we may well be content, that by this Method we are brought to eternal Felicity, without aſking, why rather by this, than any other.

Yet even to that Inquiry ſome Anſwer may be returned. The Poverty and Labour, the Injuries and Provocations, the Sorrows and Pains, which our Saviour went through, with ſo perfect and conſtant a Greatneſs and Goodneſs of Mind, afford the ſtrongeſt Confirmations of our Faith in his Doctrine, and moſt powerful Incitements to practiſe the very hardeſt of his Precepts. That we are not forgiven, but on the Condition of his undergoing theſe Things, proves, that God hath an irreconcileable Abhorrence of Sin, and a high Regard to the Honour of his Government: while yet his providing for the Performance of this Condition

tion proves equally, that he hath the tendereſt Compaſſion for his fallen and helpleſs Creatures.

Other Footſteps of Wiſdom in this wonderful Tranſaction, an humble Search may undoubtedly trace. But whether many more, and yet weightier Motives to it, may not ſtill remain behind, which perhaps it is impoſſible, perhaps unfit, for us to ſee at preſent, we cannot know, for we are not told. Who would venture to ſay of the moſt familiar Object of Senſe before him, that its only Uſes are thoſe, which he is able to diſcover? And ſurely we ought not to have leſs Modeſty in Points, that are ſo much farther beyond our Reach. We believe, on the Credit of Men like ourſelves, many Things to have Influences, that we neither have experienced them to have, nor diſcern by Reaſon that they muſt have. Why then is not God to be truſted, as well as our Fellow-Creatures? And ſince, in the Affairs of this World, we often walk *not by Sight but by Faith*[y]; what Objection can there be againſt it in thoſe of another? Eſpecially conſidering, that we are only a ſmall Portion of the Whole, the Reſt of which is almoſt intirely hid from

[y] 2 Cor. v. 7.

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us: and cannot even conjecture, what Dependences there may be of one Part on the other; and much leſs, what thoſe Dependences may require.

It plainly appears, that Men are by no Means the only Beings intereſted in our bleſſed Lord. The Scripture teaches, that, as by *him and for him were created all Things that are in Heaven and are in Earth, viſible and inviſible, and by him all Things conſiſt*: ſo *by him alſo was God pleaſed, having made Peace through the Blood of his Croſs, to reconcile all Things to himſelf, whether they be Things in Earth, or Things in Heaven*[z]: *that in the Diſpenſation of the Fulneſs of Times, he might gather together in one all Things in Chriſt; both which are in Heaven and which are on Earth, even in him*[a]. Such Hints, as theſe, of a Scheme of Providence amazingly extenſive, were not given, either to gratify or excite our Curioſity; but to admoniſh us, that, in the religious Adminiſtration of the Univerſe, there are Particulars, not deſigned to be comprehended by us at preſent, but by ſome other Part of the Creation; Things done *to the Intent*, (as the Apoſtle elſewhere more explicitly informs us) *that now unto the Principali-*

[z] Col. i. 16—20. [a] Eph. i. 10.

*ties*,

*ties and Powers in heavenly Places might be made known, by the Church, the manifold Wisdom of God, according to the eternal Purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord* [b]. Well then may it become us to be modest in judging of a Plan so much too great for us; and to reverence, without expecting to search out fully, that *Mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, wherein*, we are expressly told, *are hid all the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge* [c]. I proceed therefore now,

II. To shew under what Obligations this Dominion of our Saviour lays us. And these are, First to acknowledge, Secondly to obey it.

If the original Relation we bear to our Creator is to be owned and respected; the next we stand in, to our Redeemer, is as justly intitled to our Regard. That one is taught by Nature, the other by Revelation only, makes no Difference. Being equally real, they are equally Grounds of Duty: and Neglect of ei-

[b] Eph. iii. 10, 11. "We know not what Need there was to set up a Head and Chieftain, in Opposition to *the Prince of this World, the Prince of the Power of the Air*, &c. whereof there are more than obscure Intimations in Scripture." Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity, p. 530. Vol. II. of his Works.

[c] Col. ii. 2, 3.

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ther is alike profane. God, the great Ruler of the World, may both adminiſter the Whole of it in ſuch a Form as he thinks fit; and vary the Regulations of each Part, as varying Circumſtances require. There can poſſibly be no more Room to doubt, whether under the general Laws of his moral Kingdom he may form, from Time to Time, particular Inſtitutions of Religion; than whether, under the general Laws of human Society, may be formed particular Inſtitutions of Government. Suppoſe then a Perſon were to advance, concerning the latter, what ſome bold Writers have done concerning the former; were to profeſs an intire Submiſſion to the mutual Obligations of rational Beings at large, but an utter Contempt of the peculiar Statutes of the Community, in which he lived: ſhould declare, that the Commands of the civil Power were only a Republication of the Law of Nature; that this being abſolutely perfect, nothing could be added to it, nothing preſcribed, which was not obligatory before ſuch Preſcription; and that therefore all Injunctions and Determinations, by national Authority, of what common Reaſon had not enjoined and determined, were arbitrary, tyrannical and unjuſt; that public Wiſdom, being always

always the ſame, muſt always direct the ſame Things; and therefore different Orders could never have Force in different Ages or Provinces: would not theſe Notions be extremely abſurd? And ſurely they are no leſs abſurd in Religion, than ſocial Life. If Men may form themſelves with good Cauſe into particular civil Eſtabliſhments, God may form them with better Cauſe into particular religious Eſtabliſhments, ſuch as that of Chriſtianity. If our earthly Superiors may diſcern ſufficient Ground, as the Condition and Behaviour of their Subjects alter, to put all, or any Part of them, under new Regulations, or grant them new Privileges: much more may *our Father, which is in Heaven* [d], do ſo with us. If we are bound often to obey the Appointments of human Prudence without knowing the Motives of thoſe Appointments: well may Omniſcience claim the moſt unlimited Compliance. And if, laſtly, a dutiful Attachment to the Conſtitution of our Country be Part of a worthy Character; and wilful Violation of it, Diſloyalty to the State: ſurely the heartieſt Zeal for the Ordinances of our better Country is a ſtill more eſſential Part; and deliberate Contempt of them, Rebellion againſt God:

[d] Matth. vii. 11.

a dreadful Crime always, but ſingularly heinous and fatal in the preſent Caſe; becauſe theſe Ordinances are calculated throughout ſolely for our Good, temporal and ſpiritual, preſent and future; and nothing elſe can ſecure us the ſame Advantages. The Goſpel, beſides comprehending, and expreſſing more clearly, the whole of natural Religion, ſuperadds alſo, ſuch Aſſurance of Pardon, ſuch Means of Grace, and ſuch glorious Promiſes of eternal Bliſs to Body and Soul; that little do they conſider their own Intereſt, who would reſt their Caſe, if they could, on the mere Conjectures of unaſſiſted Reaſon: which, though ſufficient to render the Condition of thoſe tolerable, who have no other Guide; yet muſt be owned, in Compariſon, to leave Sinners much room for fear, and afford but ſmall Foundation for laſting Hope. Indeed, with theſe new Advantages, Chriſtianity brings in ſome new Precepts alſo: but none of them burthenſome; and all of them conducive to our Happineſs, here and hereafter; provided we not only acknowledge the Dominion we are under, but, which is the ſecond and laſt Point, obey it.

There are few who totally reject Religion: but few alſo, who receive it thoroughly and effectually.

effectually. Some truſting to the notional Belief and formal Practice of merely revealed Truths and Duties, allow themſelves to deſpiſe, and occaſionally to neglect moral Obligations. This was the great Error of the Jews in our Saviour's Days: as in Truth it hath been of Chriſtians in general ever ſince: and there cannot be a more pernicious one. But of late, eſpecially in this Nation, great Numbers have fallen into the oppoſite Error. Profeſſing the higheſt Value for Morals, they have little or none for Piety. Even that which Nature dictates, they hardly ſhew any real Concern for: and as abſolute a Contempt of the Doctrines and Appointments of Scripture, though it may be all the while they think they believe in Scripture, as they could do, if they denied it. Now very ſeldom will either the Practice, or even the Notions of Morality, in ſuch Perſons, be near ſo perfect as they ſhould be. For Diſregared to God or to any of his Commands, will ſoon bring on a farther Diſregard, both of right Behaviour towards our Fellow-Creatures, and right Government of ourſelves: till, acknowledging Virtue to be his Law, we ſhall acknowledge nothing as Virtue but what we like; leave out all uneaſy Reſtraints, put in all

agreeable Indulgences; and ſo have an excellent Rule of Life in Pretence, perhaps in Imagination, but in Reality none at all. Or ſuppoſing this to be otherwiſe: yet the Duties we owe, to him who hath made us by the Word of his Power, to him who hath redeemed us from Guilt and Miſery by his Blood, to him who is ready to purify us by his perpetual Influences, muſt be the principal Ties we are under: and did the conſcientious Obſervance of them contribute ever ſo little, (though indeed it contributes more than any Thing) to the good Order of this World; ſtill it is indiſpenſably neceſſary to a Purpoſe of far greater Moment, preparing our Hearts for the Employment and Happineſs of the World to come. We ſtrangely miſtake our Caſe, if we meaſure every Thing, as we are too apt to do, merely by its Influence on the preſent Life. This whole Scene of Things is a State of Education and Diſcipline only: we are forming and training up, by the Laws of our Saviour's Kingdom here, to ſuch a Temper and Spirit, as may render us for ever bleſſed in it hereafter. No wonder, if now, in our Condition of Infancy, we ſee not the Reaſon and Uſe of every Step taken with us. Being

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ſure we are in kind and good Hands, our Duty and our Wiſdom is to give up ourſelves intirely to God's Diſpoſal. For we know not what we do, when we preſume to ſlight any Part of what he hath preſcribed: only this we know, that *offending in one Point*, is both in reaſonable Conſtruction and in probable Conſequence, being *guilty of all*[e].

Religion, though ever in Subſtance the ſame, hath been propoſed to Mankind in different Shapes, as the Reaſon of Things in different Ages required. Under whichſoever of theſe Diſpenſations we had lived, our Buſineſs had been, humbly to conform ourſelves to it, and carefully to improve ourſelves by it, *walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord, blameleſs*[f]. But as we are happily reſerved to the fulleſt and cleareſt, the moſt rational and amiable Exhibition of Faith and Duty that the World ever ſaw or will ſee; we are ſurely bound to embrace it with peculiar Joy; to obey from the Heart every Injunction of ſo gracious a Maſter, as our bleſſed Redeemer; and, which is the End of all, make ſuch a Progreſs in real inward Devotion, Benevolence, Purity and Humility, as will bear a due Proportion to the Advantages,

[e] James ii. 10. [f] Luke i. 6.

that we enjoy. For it cannot be, that after thoſe Demonſtrations of Love, and thoſe Means of Improvement, which God hath given us in his Goſpel, he ſhould only expect us to be as good as Heathens: and yet are we not often worſe? But in vain do we call ourſelves Chriſtians, if Names and Forms be the whole of our Chriſtianity: In vain do we call the holy Jeſus Lord, unleſs, by doing ſuch Things as he commands, we become ſuch as he was. To this therefore, if we have any Senſe of Gratitude, the Love of our Saviour muſt conſtrain us: to this, if we have any Concern for Happineſs, the Fear of our Judge muſt compel us. For, as the Apoſtle, juſt before the Text, hath moſt truly obſerved, *none of us liveth to himſelf, and no Man dieth to himſelf: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord* [g]. In both States we are abſolutely his Property, and intirely at his Diſpoſal. If we obey him, *we ſhall alſo reign with him: if we deny him, he will alſo deny us* [h]. Let us therefore always bear in Mind his own awful Words: *I am he, that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the Keys of Death and of Hell* [i].

[g] Rom. xiv. 7, 8. [h] 2 Tim. ii. 12. [i] Rev. i. 18.

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# SERMON XVI.

ACTS x. 40, 41.

*Him God raiſed up the third Day, and ſhewed him openly. Not to all the People, but unto Witneſſes choſen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he roſe from the Dead.*

THE Reſurrection of our bleſſed Lord being the principal Fact, on which he himſelf put the Proof of his divine Authority; and being that Fact in particular, of which he eſpecially appointed his Apoſtles to be Witneſſes to Mankind; it concerns the Chriſtian Cauſe very nearly, that the Evidence of this Point ſhould be undeniable. And accordingly it is obviouſly plain, that no Impoſtor would ever have appealed to a Method of trying his Pretenſions, that required his being put to Death

before it could decide any thing: and that no Enthuſiaſt would ever have conducted himſelf in ſo calm and prudent a Manner, and taught ſo rational a Doctrine, as our Saviour did. It is equally plain, that his Followers could never be deceived, and imagine their Maſter alive again when he was not. They could not be deceived by their Hopes and Expectations: for they own, they deſpaired of it. They could not be deceived for want of Opportunities to find out the Truth: for they declare, that he appeared a great Number of Times, to ſeveral of them ſingly, to all of them aſſembled, once to the Number of five Hundred, by Day as well as by Night, in very different and diſtant Places, ſometimes unexpectedly, ſometimes by Appointment: that they not only ſaw, but touched and handled him; that he walked and converſed and eat and drank with them; that he gave them theſe Evidences for no leſs than forty Days together; and then was viſibly taken up into the Clouds, before their Eyes. If now it be poſſible for ſo many Perſons to be miſtaken in all this, it is impoſſible for any one to be rationally ſure of any Thing.

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It may alſo be ſhewn further, that as they were not deceived themſelves, ſo neither did they intend to deceive others in this Matter. There is no Manner of Reaſon to ſuſpect, that they would have done it, if they could. For ſuppoſing them to think he came from God; they might well conclude that God would take Care of his own Cauſe, and did not need their turning Cheats to ſerve it. And ſuppoſing they now at laſt thought him a Seducer; what could there be, either honeſter, or wiſer, or more likely, for them to do, than to confeſs their Miſtake; with due Indignation at his having impoſed on them ſo long, and drawn them into ſuch great Inconveniences and Dangers? But even if they had been deſirous to ſet up an Impoſture: they had evidently neither Skill to contrive, nor Courage to attempt, nor Power to execute it. They were comparatively but a Handful of Men in all: and they had very lately had full Experience, that they could neither truſt one another, nor themſelves: for one of them had betrayed his Maſter; the moſt zealous Man amongſt them had denied him, and all the reſt had forſaken him. The whole Weight of Authority, *Jewiſh* and *Roman*,

*man*, was againſt them, careful to watch them, and (as they ſaw by the Example before their Eyes) determined not to ſpare them, if they went on. Then as for the People; they had never oppoſed the Magiſtrates in any Part of this Affair; they had furiouſly joined with them in the laſt Part; and there was not the leaſt Likelihood now, of their undertaking the Defence of a few unknown and mean Men, who taught a Syſtem of Doctrine very unwelcome to their zealous Spirits; and built it on a ſtrange Fact, utterly contradictory to their ſettled Opinions. For as they had no Notion, that the *Meſſiah* was to be put to Death: they could have none of his riſing again. Surely, in theſe Circumſtances, if his Diſciples had acted on worldly Motives, their Point muſt have been to provide for their own Safety by Flight and Silence: and thus, for ought that appears, they might have been very ſafe. But if they reſolved to pretend a Reſurrection; their very firſt Step muſt be to get the Body into their Power, that it might not be produced againſt them: and in this, guarded as it was, they muſt either have periſhed, or at leaſt have failed. Or had they ſucceeded; it muſt have been notorious, by what Means they had ſucceeded;

ceeded; and the chief Prieſts would have been able to give the World ſome better Account of the Matter, than that abſurd one of the Soldiers, affirming, (what they could not know; and durſt not have owned, if it had been true) that, while they ſlept, his Followers came, and ſtole him away. Or could they poſſibly have gone thus far undiſcovered: ſtill, what Proſpect had they before them, by carrying on the ſame Scheme, which their Lord had done, but to be perſecuted and put to Death, as he had been? They were perſecuted accordingly: ſome of them put to Death ſoon; the reſt, after they had been harraſſed many Years: yet all perſiſted in their Teſtimony to the End of their Lives. Now Men will too commonly renounce what they know to be true, rather than ſuffer for it: but by no Means chuſe to ſuffer, in this Manner, for what they know to be falſe. Or however unaccountably obſtinate one or two may, by great Chance, happen to be, Numbers will not be ſo; eſpecially at Times, and Places, remote from each other. And it muſt be further obſerved, that not only theſe Perſons continued uniform and unmoveable in their Teſtimony, but they none of them ever diſgraced it, by

any Sort of vicious or intereſted Behaviour. And, though nothing, but Love of Truth, could induce Men to join with them; and there was every poſſible Motive beſides, againſt it: yet Multitudes of all Ranks in all Nations did join with them, did ſuffer with them; did atteſt their performing the ſame Miracles with their Maſter, and enabling others to perform them: and thus they went on, till, with no other Weapons, they and their Succeſſors conquered the World.

All theſe Things have been frequently and fully proved; few of them denied, no ſolid Reaſon alledged for denying any of them: only ſmall Cavils and Difficulties have been raiſed, here and there: amongſt which, one that appears perhaps the moſt conſiderable, is grounded on what St. *Peter* mentions in the Text, of his own Accord, that our Saviour after his Reſurrection appeared, *not to all the People, but to Witneſſes choſen before of God.* Upon this it hath been argued, that ſelecting only a few Perſons, and all thoſe out of his own Party, to be his Witneſſes, inſtead of permitting every one to ſee him that would, was a very ſuſpicious Method: that he ought to have ſhewn himſelf to all the People, for they were all

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concerned in the Matter; at leaſt to all the Rulers: for, if he had convinced them; the Teſtimony of Perſons, who had been ſo much his Enemies, and were of ſuch Weight and Credit, would have ſatisfied the whole Nation, and of Conſequence the whole World. This Objection which may poſſibly ſometimes perplex Believers, as well as afford a Handle for profane Talk to Unbelievers, I ſhall make it my preſent Buſineſs to anſwer.

And, in the firſt Place, it miſrepreſents the Fact. There is neither the leaſt Proof, nor the leaſt Probability, that any one, who deſired to ſee our Saviour after his Reſurrection, was refuſed it. The Apoſtles were choſen, not to be the only Perſons, that ſhould ſee him; far from it: but to be the chief Perſons, that ſhould go through the World, to teſtify they had ſeen him; and to inſtruct and ſuperintend thoſe, who ſhould believe on him. They were of his Party indeed. But what could make them ſo? nothing, but his Doctrine and Miracles firſt: and his Reſurrection afterwards. For, though even whilſt he lay dead, they honoured him; yet their Faith in him, as the *Meſſiah*, was almoſt dead too, till they ſaw him alive again. If ever ſo many more had ſeen him,

him, and been convinced by it; muſt not they have become of his Party alſo? and would that have deſtroyed their Evidence? If it would, he could not poſſibly have any Evidence, though he had appeared and convinced the Rulers and the whole City. And if it would not, why were not the Apoſtles, and other firſt Chriſtians, good Evidence? For ought we know, many of the five Hundred, to whom he appeared at once, might be convinced by that Appearance, and not before. But however that be, if an Atteſtation of five Hundred Perſons, or a much leſs Number to any Fact, be not enough, no Number can be. For if ſo many can, every one of them, either be deceived, or combine to deceive others; ever ſo many more may alſo: and then there is an End of human Teſtimony. Therefore, in all Caſes, a competent Quantity of Witneſſes to any Action, or Writing, is deemed ſufficient; and procuring as many, as could poſſibly be got, is never required. This indeed was a Caſe of a very extraordinary Nature. And I hope you have ſeen, there was Proof of it to a very extraordinary Degree: ſuch Proof, that, had this one Circumſtance, of our Saviour's not appearing to all the People, been ever ſo unaccountable;

countable; nay, had there been many other ſtrange ones beſides; the direct poſitive Evidence would have greatly outweighed whatever Suſpicions could be raiſed from them, with any Pretence of Reaſon: and to more than Suſpicions they could not amount.

God indeed could have given, no doubt, yet ſtronger Proof, than we have. But is he obliged to give on all Occaſions, or any, the ſtrongeſt he can? Doth he give us ſuch, in the moſt important Affairs of common Life? Doth he give us ſuch, of his own Exiſtence? And are we, for want of it, neither to believe any Thing, nor act any way, in reſpect of this World or another? Can God be bound to gratify the Fancifulneſs, the Indolence, the Obſtinacy of his Creatures, ſo as to afford them ſtill more and more Evidence, the more inconſiderate and perverſe they are? Or are not we bound, humbly to ſeek, thankfully to receive, and carefully to uſe, what he doth afford us? We may think indeed, that it had been greater Goodneſs to afford us further Proofs yet: and ſo we may think it would, for God to have done a Multitude of other Things, which yet he hath not done: for Inſtance, to have made us happy, without putting us to any Trial of our

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Behaviour: yet this World is plainly a State of Trial, in which our preſent and future Good, or Evil, depends on our Conduct. And why may not our fairneſs in receiving Evidence be one Thing tried, as well as our Obedience, in acting ſuitably to it, another? Now the higheſt poſſible Degree of Evidence leaves no room almoſt for this Trial. And therefore what our Saviour ſaid to St. *Thomas*, was perfectly juſt: *Becauſe thou haſt ſeen me, thou haſt believed: bleſſed are they, that have not ſeen, and yet have believed* [a]. That Situation gives an Opportunity for honeſt and candid Minds, to ſhew themſelves ſuch, and be rewarded for it. And if it doth lead captious and unfair ones to ſhew themſelves too, and be puniſhed; how have they deſerved better?

But particularly, how had the Jews deſerved more, or ſo much, Proof, of our Saviour's Miſſion, as he had, before his Reſurrection, vouchſafed them? They had ſeen innumerable Miracles of various Kinds, performed by him: they had ſeen ſeveral Miracles of this very Kind. Still, they had not only refuſed to acknowledge him, but deliberately rejected, condemned, and put him to Death. Where then

[a] John xx. 29.

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was their claim to further Favours? If he had forbidden his Apoſtles to mention his Reſurrection to them; and directed them to preach the Goſpel only to the Gentiles; had it been unjuſt? But inſtead of this, he gave them, notwithſtanding, the firſt Knowledge of it, with the ſame Evidence for it, that he gave the reſt of Mankind. And he had plainly foretold, that he would give them no more: that his Diſciples ſhould ſee him after his Death, and they ſhould not [b]. For indeed his Commiſſion, ſo far as it related peculiarly to inſtructing them, was now at an End. The believing *Jews* were to make Part of his Church, in common with the *Gentiles*. The unbelieving ones he had no further eſpecial Concern with, than to inflict on them, unleſs they repented, that Puniſhment, which God had decreed. And on what Foundation, after this, could they be intitled to his appearing amongſt them? Every Nation, every Perſon upon Earth, ever ſince, hath had, and ſtill hath, full as good a Title, and a better, to expect his appearing to them alſo. For if it were neceſſary, in order to give the Jews ſufficient Evidence: it is neceſſary, in order to give it us.

[b] Matth. xxiii. 39. John xiv. 19.

And if they might reaſonably hope for it as Matter of Favour, why not we likewiſe, who live ſo long after, and, I hope, have not deſerved quite ſo ill?

This Objection therefore proves a great deal too much, and for that Reaſon proves nothing; even ſuppoſing, that our Saviour's public Appearance, after his Death, would have had ſuch happy Effects, as ſome have pretended. But indeed the Conſequences of this, which God alone can know perfectly, (and therefore it might become us to acquieſce in his Judgment) have certainly been conſidered very imperfectly by theſe Objectors. For if our bleſſed Lord had appeared, either to all the People, or to all the Rulers of the People, what is it likely would have followed?

If to all the People: many of them, to be ſure, had never ſeen him before his Reſurrection: and therefore could have no Conviction of it from ſeeing him after. Many had ſeen him but tranſiently in a Crowd: ſome only when he was diſfigured with Ill-uſage, and ſtooping under his Croſs: probably not a few had miſtaken for him the Perſon, that carried it Part of the Way in his Stead. Even when he was fixed upon it, and lifted up; Diſtance

would hinder ſome, and the Change of his Features, by Agonies and Death, would hinder others, from knowing him again with any Certainty. Juſt as in the Caſe of the blind Man; one Part would have ſaid, *It is he*; another, *he is like him* [c]: but a third perhaps quite the contrary. Every one would have ſpoken, as their Fancy or Prejudices led them: his Enemies would have magnified and triumphed in the Difference of Perſuaſions; and no certain Judgment could ever have been formed, unleſs the many, who know but little of him, had ſubmitted their Opinions to the few, in Compariſon, that knew him well: which poſſibly they would not. But if they had, this would have amounted to very little more, than believing the Teſtimony of others, without ſeeing him themſelves at all. And whether the Number, then preſent at *Jeruſalem*, of ſuch as were perſonally acquainted with him, might be greater, or leſs, than the five Hundred, whom he appeared to at once, we cannot know. But were it much greater; ſtill ſuppoſe only, what is very ſuppoſable, that ſome of theſe had been induced, either then or afterwards, by Promiſes, or Threatenings, or Puniſh-

[c] John ix. 9.

ments, to deny it was he; what Perplexities muſt that have raiſed? And how much wiſer was the Method, which God took, of ſhewing him to ſuch alone, as knew him thoroughly, and he foreſaw would teſtify their Knowledge with Uprightneſs and Conſtancy!

If then, to avoid this endleſs Contradiction, he had appeared to the chief Prieſts and Elders only: ſtill, ſeveral of them, in all Likelihood, either knew him not, or but imperfectly. And had they all known him ever ſo well: it is far from certain, that, on ſeeing him, they would have believed in him, after what they had ſeen, without believing in him. Amongſt other Things, they ſeveral of them ſaw *Lazarus* riſe, and more had Opportunities of converſing with him after he was riſen. Yet they did not believe in *Jeſus* for that. They might have aſcribed this Miracle, as well as others, to *Beelzebub:* or, as their Succeſſors, down to this Day, abſurdly aſcribe all of them, to pretended magic Arts. They muſt indeed have been convinced, that, by ſome Means or other, he was riſen: but that would have made them no Witneſſes for him. It appears by their whole Conduct, that they were convinced of it, without ſeeing him. Not only their bribing

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the Soldiers; but their leaving his Diſciples unmoleſted at firſt; their bearing ſo quietly all their Boldneſs of Speech for ſome Time afterwards; their ſuffering *Gamaliel* to expreſs his Doubts, whether this Matter were not of God; their following in Part his Advice, to let them alone, which was founded on thoſe Doubts; inſtead of proſecuting them to the utmoſt, as Impoſtors: in ſhort their whole Hiſtory, in the Beginning of the *Acts*; and particularly ſeveral Things in it, which St. *Luke* doth not ſeem once to have thought of applying to this Purpoſe, evidently ſhew, that the Jewiſh Rulers well knew, a ſtrict Inquiry would not ſerve their Turn; and therefore tried, as long as they could, to ſtifle and conceal what had happened, in Hopes it would gradually be forgotten. Undoubtedly their wiſer Way had been, to have owned the Truth, and yielded to it. But they were too wicked to be wiſe: and ſo contrived only to be cunning. Our Saviour had declared in ſtrong Terms againſt them: they had proceeded to the laſt Extremities againſt him. Therefore, beſides their ſpeculative Prejudices; if he prevailed, all their Authority, they ſaw, was utterly gone; and their Perſons, they probably

imagined, were not ſafe. So that, hardened as they were, and perſuaded it was too late to retreat; laying new Evidence before them would only have increaſed their Guilt in reſiſting it: they would have believed nothing they could help; they would have acknowledged nothing at all; but, if Need had required, averred the direct contrary to what their own Eyes had beheld. Probably indeed they were not all profligate alike: ſome of them would have ſubmitted to our Saviour, if they had ſeen him: but how do we know, that the ſame Perſons did not, upon the Teſtimony of others ſeeing him? For they, whom any Proof would convince, might very well be convinced by ſuch Proof, as that was: and we are expreſſly told, that a *great Company of the Prieſts were obedient to the Faith*[a]: whoſe Conviction, and that of thouſands more, at *Jeruſalem* itſelf, ſo very ſoon after, againſt their former deep rooted Perſuaſion, and preſent Intereſt, is a ſtrong Confirmation of the Fact aſſerted by thoſe, who were Witneſſes: and, on the Whole, may be full as ſatisfactory, as if they had been Witneſſes themſelves.

[a] Acts vi. 7.

But

But ſuppoſing that our Saviour's Appearance to them would have converted all the Rulers: undoubtedly this would have had a great, perhaps a general Effect, in that one Nation. But every Nation, and every ſucceeding Age, was concerned equally in this Matter: and what Effect would it have had upon them? The *Romans* firſt, would have conſidered it as a *Jewiſh* Fraud, concerted amongſt themſelves, to raiſe the Credit of their own Religion; and no more have regarded the Miracles of the Apoſtles amongſt their Countrymen, in theſe Circumſtances, than we do thoſe of the Church of *Rome*, pretended to be wrought, where every one is either unwilling, or afraid, to detect them. The Infidels of later Days, who believe nothing of the other Miracles which the Jews believe, would they have believed this, merely becauſe the Jews believed it? Since they cannot even now refrain from aſcribing our Religion to Policy and Prieſt-craft, though all the Jewiſh Politicians and Prieſts were zealous againſt it to the utmoſt; what would they have ſaid, if both had been for it, on ſeeing Chriſt after his Reſurrection? Undoubtedly, that they had feigned a Difficulty of being brought over into what they had, in Truth, originally contrived;

trived; and, by their Art and Authority, prevented the Diſcoveries, that elſe might have been made; or huſhed up thoſe, that actually were made.

Nor would even this have been the worſt Conſequence yet. Had both the Rulers, and the People received him as the Meſſiah, on the Evidence of his appearing a ſecond Time alive: ſtill they would have received him, according to their own falſe Notion of the Meſſiah, as a temporal Prince; and been immediately up in Arms to ſet him on the Throne, whether he would or not. For when he had performed but one Miracle that took with them: he found they were reſolved inſtantly to *make him King by Force*[e]; and he avoided it only by eſcaping from them. He might indeed, when he was riſen again, have plainly told them all their Miſtake: but they would either have rejected him once more upon it; (and then, to what Purpoſe had they ſeen him?) or they would have thought he meant ſomething different from what he ſeemed to ſay; as the Diſciples did, when he very plainly foretold his own Death. Even them he could never ſet thoroughly right in the Article of his

[e] John vi. 15.

King-

Kingdom, ſo long as he remained on Earth: much leſs the People. They were uneaſy under their new Maſters: they expected a Deliverer: their Expectations were juſt then at the Height: and had he ſhewn himſelf amongſt them, and been acknowledged by them; what could have reſtrained them, but ſuch a Power, as God never exerciſes over the Wills of Men; for it would deſtroy their Freedom, and alter the whole Conſtitution of the moral World? Therefore, inſtead of *appearing to all the People*, he did not let his Diſciples preach him to any of the People, from his Reſurrection till after his Aſcenſion: for had the Body of them been told, and believed, that the Meſſiah was riſen, and ſtill amongſt them; of Courſe they would have been eager in ſeeking him; and what Rumours and Tumults would this have raiſed, and what muſt have been the Conſequences? After this, if he had left them, and aſcended into Heaven, the Remedy had come too late: the Ferment would have continued; and it is impoſſible to know, to what Height it might have riſen.

But had the Jews been ever ſo quiet; ever ſo much convinced by our Saviour, that they

ought

ought to remain quiet: yet, when once the *Romans*, who muſt know their former Notions of the *Meſſiah*, came to underſtand, that they all agreed that he was at laſt come; they would never have believed this Calm to be any thing, but an Artifice, to lull them aſleep, till Matters were ripe for a general Inſurrection. They would therefore have ſeized on the leading Men immediately, called in their Forces from the Countries round, and required the whole Nation to renounce their new King. Had they ſubmitted to this, there had been an End of Chriſtianity amongſt them. Had they reſiſted, as in all Probability they would: upon the *Romans* prevailing, what the chief Prieſts apprehended had certainly come to paſs; they would have *taken away their Place and Nation*[f], and the Whole would have been charged on the Doctrine of Chriſt. If the Jews had prevailed; they would have imagined their Succeſs a full Proof, that the Meſſiah was yet virtually, though not corporally, amongſt them; and proceeded to extend his Dominion as wide as they could: under which Circumſtances, the Goſpel, in a Manner abſolutely contrary to its Nature and

[f] John xi. 48.

Genius,

Genius, muſt have owed its Progreſs, if it made any, to Force, not Perſuaſion; and ſo have been liable to the ſame unanſwerable Objection, that the Religion of *Mahomet* is now.

Or laſtly, ſuppoſing what is in the higheſt Degree unlikely, that neither the Jews had rebelled, nor the *Romans* ſuſpected them, but both had been made ſuch as they ought, by a public Appearance of our Saviour after his Reſurrection: undoubtedly this had been very happy for that Age, and perhaps the next or two: but what had been the Caſe of diſtant Ages? We, that live in the latter Days, ſhould, by theſe Means, have loſt intirely all that ſtrong and neceſſary Evidence, for the Truth of his Miracles and Hiſtory, which ariſes now from the Impoſſibility of his primitive Diſciples having any Motive to deceive Men, in teaching a Doctrine, for which they ſuffered, ſo patiently and cheerfully, Perſecution and Death. Chriſtianity would then, in all likelihood, have been conſidered as a Superſtructure of *Roman* Policy, erected, by an artful Emperor, on a Piece of Jewiſh Enthuſiaſm, which he found very commodious for bring-

bringing the World into good Order; particularly into quiet Subjection to its new Maſter. And the Meekneſs of Spirit, which our Religion enjoins, and the great Streſs it lays on Obedience to the civil Magiſtrate, would have been thought a Demonſtration, that this, and nothing elſe, was the real Truth. So that the whole would have ſeemed by this Method a Contrivance of Man: whereas now it appears plainly the Work of God; affording reaſonable Evidence to good Minds; preventing the Harm, that muſt have followed, if bad ones, continuing ſuch, had joined with them; and turning that Oppoſition, both of Jews and Heathens, which threatened the Ruin of the Goſpel, into a Proof of its Truth, that will ſupport it for ever.

Theſe Conſiderations are ſurely ſufficient to remove any Doubts of ſerious and humble Minds on this Head: to convince Objectors, that they do not always ſee to the Bottom of what they venture to talk about very freely: and to make it probable, that, in other Points, as well as the preſent, when they come to be thoroughly examined, *the Fooliſhneſs of God* will always be found *wiſer than Men*[z]: which

[z] 1 Cor. i. 25.

good

good Purpoſes may ſurely juſtify dwelling, now and then, ſomewhat largely on a Subject of leſs general and practical Uſe. It is true, the bad Conſequences, that might have attended our Saviour's public Appearance after his Death, are ſeveral of them only conjectural: but the good ones, imagined likely to flow from it, are ſo too: and ſtronger Conjectures are very juſtly oppoſed to weaker. Nay were any, or ever ſo many, of the Reaſons, alledged for his Conduct in this Reſpect, of no Weight at all: yet who knows, what others there may ſtill remain in the endleſs Treaſures of the divine Wiſdom, to be diſcovered hereafter? And what hath ſo fallible and ſhort-ſighted a Creature, as Man, to do; but thankfully to receive whatever Knowledge, be it more or leſs perfect, his Maker ſhall vouchſafe to give him; and apply himſelf with the utmoſt Care, to act ſuitably to what he underſtands; inſtead of raiſing Objections and Cavils, out of every Particular, that he is ignorant of? *For the ſecret Things belong unto the Lord our God: but thoſe Things, which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our Chil-*

*Children for ever; that we may do all the Words of this Law* [h].

Let us all therefore learn, not only to believe firmly in Speculation, that our Saviour is risen again; but in the Faith of his Resurrection to prepare for our own: earnestly praying God, *to raise us from the Death of Sin to the Life of Righteousness; and diligently seeking those Things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right Hand of God; that, when he shall appear, we also may appear with him in Glory* [i]. After his Crucifixion he appeared on Earth only to a few: but the Day is approaching, when, *behold, he cometh with Clouds, and every Eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all Kindreds of the Earth,* that rejected or disobeyed him, *shall wail because of him* [k]: and *shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord and from the Glory of his Power, when he shall come to be glorified in his Saints, and to be admired in all them that believed the Testimony of him in that Day* [l]. *For the Lord shall descend from Heaven with a Shout, with the*

[h] Deut. xxix. 29. [i] Col. iii. 1, 4. [k] Rev. i. 7. [l] 2 Thess. i. 9, 10.

*Voice*

*Voice of the Arch-angel and with the Trump of God: and the Dead in Chriſt ſhall riſe firſt; and they which are alive and remain ſhall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air, and ſo ſhall we be ever with the Lord*[m].

[m] 1 Theſſ. iv. 15, 16, 17.

SER-

# SERMON XVII.

2 Cor. v. 20.

*Now then we are Embaſſadors for Chriſt, as though God did beſeech you by us; we pray you in Chriſt's Stead, Be ye reconciled to God.*

THE Miniſters of the Goſpel ought ever to have in their Minds the End of their Office, that they may diligently uſe the right Means to attain it: and the People under our Care ſhould be no leſs attentive to it, in order to receive, by co-operating faithfully with us, the Benefits intended to be conveyed to them through our Hands. Now the Nature of our Commiſſion is ſet forth in the Text: where you have

I. The Character, in which we act, *Embaſſadors for Chriſt.*

II. The Errand, on which we are ſent, to *pray Men* that they would *be reconciled to God.*

I. Our Character is that of *Embaſſadors for Chriſt*, which means *inſtead of* Chriſt, as the ſame Word is tranſlated in the latter Part of the Verſe. God ſent his Son into the World, as the Meſſenger of his Covenant; the Perſon, by whom he notified his gracious Promiſes, and the Conditions of them, to Mankind. When he ceaſed to inſtruct them perſonally, his Words to his Apoſtles were, *as the Father hath ſent me, even ſo ſend I you* [a]. Nor did he ſend the twelve only, but gave to his Church other Paſtors and Teachers alſo, *for the Work of the Miniſtry, for the edifying of his Body, till we all come unto perfect Men in Chriſt* [b], and promiſed to be *with them alway even unto the End of the World* [c]. Such therefore the Apoſtles appointed in every City; deputed them to *work the Work of the Lord, as they themſelves did* [d]; directed ſome of theſe to appoint others [e], as *Feeders of the Flock, under Chriſt the chief*

[a] John xx. 21. [b] Eph. iv. 12, 13. [c] Matth. xxviii. 20.
[d] 1 Cor. xvi. 10. [e] 2 Tim. ii. 2. Tit. i. 5.

*Shep-*

*Shepherd* [f]; required them to *exhort and rebuke with all Authority* [g], and commanded Chriſtians *to ſubmit to them, as Watchmen over their Souls, who muſt give Account* [h].

God forbid, that you ſhould have Cauſe to be alarmed at the higheſt of theſe Claims. The ſame Scripture, on which they are founded, guards againſt it ſufficiently. As to temporal Matters: our Saviour's *Kingdom is not of this World* [i]; nor have his Miniſters, as ſuch, any peculiar Right to interfere in the Affairs of it. *The Lord* indeed *hath ordained, that they who preach the Goſpel, ſhould live of the Goſpel* [k]. But what Proviſion ſhould be made for that Purpoſe, he hath left entirely to the Conſcience and the Prudence of Men. Our Authority of demanding even a Maintenance from the unwilling, and certainly then the further Privileges that any of us enjoy, are derived ſolely from the voluntary Gift of the civil Power. And as to ſpiritual Concerns: the very Apoſtles were bound to teach only what their Maſter commanded. And they indeed could not miſtake any Part of it: but we may; and therefore you are not obliged to believe implicitly what we affirm. So far ſtill as Per-

[f] 1 Pet. v. 2, 4. [g] Tit. ii. 5. [h] Heb. xiii. 17.
[i] John xvii. 36. [k] 1 Cor. ix. 14.

ſons are ſenſible, that they cannot determine for themſelves, they ſhould follow their eſtabliſhed Guides, if they have Reaſon to think them ſkilful and honeſt. But to all others we apply as St. *Paul* did: *I ſpeak as to wiſe Men: judge ye what I ſay*[l].

Whatever appears true to any Man by his own Reaſon, or to any Chriſtian by the Word of God, he ought to obſerve, though no one reminded him of it. And whatever any one elſe proves to him, though abſolutely unauthorized, he is bound to admit. But when God himſelf, knowing Man's Need and yet unwillingneſs to be taught, hath expreſly ordained a Succeſſion of Perſons to execute that Employment: if either we neglect to give, or you to receive Inſtruction, it is a highly aggravated Contempt of his Authority, and of his Mercy. *We have* indeed *this Treaſure in earthen Veſſels*[m]: and too often add Sins to our Infirmities, by which we diſhonour him we repreſent, and ſhall bring down ſevere Puniſhment on our own Heads. But ſtill, as in temporal Societies, Officers, though bad and unfit Men, muſt be duly obeyed, as far as their Commiſſion extends, in Reſpect to the ſupreme Power, under

[l] 1 Cor. x. 15. [m] 2 Cor. iv. 7.

which

which they act; so in the spiritual one of the Church, when you hear the Truths of Religion from the worst of us all, you are to receive them as the Word of God, for such indeed they are, not as the Word of Men. And a Message from him deserves the utmost Honour; let them, who bring it, deserve what they will.

Are you then, careful to regard what we say the more, if there be Reason to think well of us; but as little prejudiced against it as possible, if there be not: or do you slight the Commands of your Maker, when they come by a Person whom you do not esteem, or barely do not like? But if you like him ever so well, attend on him ever so constantly, applaud him ever so highly, and stop there; you have done nothing. It is not Entertainment, it is *the Law*, that you are to *seek at his Mouth: for he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts*[a]. You are to look beyond us, to the End of our Mission: not to pay us any such Deference, even for that, as may endanger our Humility, lessen our Usefulness, and pervert us into Instruments of Harm instead of Good; but only to excite in your Minds, from a due Veneration of him who

[a] Mal. ii. 7.

ſends us, a due Attention to what the Text mentions.

II. The Errand he ſends us upon. Were that merely to notify a Doctrine ever ſo ſtrange, ſhort of palpable Abſurdity, a Command ever ſo difficult, a Threatning ever ſo ſevere, you would be bound to receive it, on the Authority of proper Credentials, with the moſt ſubmiſſive Reverence. But what is the Meſſage, that his Miniſters bring you from him? *Be ye reconciled to God.* Surely a moſt gracious, but at the ſame Time a very alarming one. For you will ſay, are we Enemies to him then? Why doubtleſs the Expreſſion implies, that poſſibly we may. And it is our higheſt Concern to inquire immediately, (if we have not done it) whether we be or not.

*By Nature we are Children of Wrath*[o]: involved in the Mortality, to which our firſt Parents were condemned; in the Corruption, with which they tainted themſelves. We experience both. And God muſt conſider our bad Inclinations, however we came by them, with Diſlike as well as Pity: and may juſtly leave us in this fallen Eſtate, unleſs we make Uſe of the proper Means to be relieved from

[o] Eph. ii. 3.

it.

it. What Care then have you taken in this Reſpect? "*We have been by Baptiſm regenerate and grafted into the Body of Chriſt's Church*[?]: and we have perſonally ratified ſince, the Vow then made in our Name." You have done well: and theſe Things intitle you, to Aſſiſtance from above for amending yourſelves, and to eternal Life on Condition of your endeavouring it faithfully. But all Men have broken this Condition by actual Sin. What have you done then to renew your Covenant? Have you lamented your Failings, and redoubled your Watchfulneſs: or have you tamely given Way to irregular Appetites and Paſſions? Have you not indeed ſtriven to excuſe, to juſtify, to encourage, to make Proviſion for them? ſometimes perhaps you have reſiſted them: but from what Principle? From that of Conſcience towards God: or of Intereſt, Convenience, Reputation only? If the latter, they are no religious Motives. If the former, have you reſiſted in all Sorts of Temptations, and in the main ſucceſsfully? "No: we muſt own, we have commonly been overpowered; and are ſo ſtill." Why, in Proportion as this is your Caſe, both Reaſon and Scripture pro-

[?] Office of Baptiſm.

nounce it a bad one: for *without Holineſs*, habitual Piety and Virtue, *no Man ſhall ſee the Lord*[q]. Are you then trying all Methods to increaſe your Strength: or do you give up the Conteſt; ſometimes perhaps a little grieved; but oftener ſecretly glad, that you have gotten ſo ſpecious a Pretence, as that of your Weakneſs, for living as you like?

But you will ſay, how are we to increaſe our Strength? Partly, by repreſenting to yourſelves, ſeriouſly and frequently, the Baſeneſs and the Danger of ſinning againſt God; by avoiding reſolutely the Things and the Perſons, that incline you to it; by reading good Books, and hearing good Advice in public and private. Something of all this you have probably done: but whether near ſo much as you could, aſk your own Hearts. Or ſuppoſing you have: there is one eſſential Point wanting. Have you applied to your heavenly Father for his Help? Scripture and Experience prove, that *we are not ſufficient of ourſelves*[r]. Now he is completely able, he is intirely willing, he hath expreſly promiſed, to aſſiſt us. But he juſtly expects, that we ſhould own our Dependence on him, by aſking his Aid. And if we

[q] Heb. xii. 14. [r] 2 Cor. iii. 5.

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are too proud, or too negligent for that, he leaves us to the Conſequences. "Yes: but we have prayed, as well as endeavoured, and all to no Purpoſe." But how have you prayed? Only as a Matter of Courſe perhaps, without much Perſuaſion, that it would do you any great Good; without inward Penitence and Humiliation; without Attention and Earneſtneſs; or however without due Perſeverance. And what can you expect from ſuch Prayers?

But ſuppoſing, that you are ſatisfied with yourſelves on theſe Heads, what Plea have you made to God for his Pardon and Help? "That of his infinite Mercy." But his Mercy flows to Mankind in a particular Channel. *God was in Chriſt reconciling the World to himſelf*, as the Verſe before the Text teaches. Have you then applied through him? Perſons ignorant of him indeed cannot: and the Judge of all will undoubtedly conſider their Caſe with Equity. But if you, to whom he is revealed, ſeek to be reconciled without him, it is reſolving not to be reconciled at all. "No: we have prayed in his Name conſtantly." But hath it been with any inward Senſe of what he hath done for you, and is to you; with any real Faith and Truſt in his Atonement

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and Grace, disclaiming all Merit of your own; with any fixed and active Resolution to *take his Yoke upon you*[s], and observe his Appointments in order to attain his Likeness? Possibly you will plead, that such Faith and Resolution are not in your Power: *they are the Gift of God*[t], as appears from Scripture: and therefore it is none of your Fault, if you have them not. But it is in your Power to yield to *his Spirit* when he *strives with you*[u], to dwell on his Convictions of your Sins and your Danger, to cherish Desires of what you want, to endeavour at what you are commanded, to use the Means which the Gospel prescribes. If you have done thus, go on to do it, and you will infallibly succeed. If not, this is the Method, which, *as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's Stead,* to take, that ye may *be reconciled to God.* Whilst you neglect it, you can be no other than his Enemies: and think with yourselves, we beg you, in the next Place, how joyless, how terrible a Situation that must be.

He is infinitely wise: and therefore knows what is best for us. He is infinitely good: and therefore his Directions point it out to us. He

[s] Matth. xi. 29. [t] Eph. ii. 8. [u] Gen. vi. 3.

is perfectly juſt and holy: and therefore loves right and abhors wrong Behaviour. His Power is irreſiſtible, and therefore he can reward or puniſh to the utmoſt: his Veracity is unqueſtionable, and therefore he will reward or puniſh eternally. What can we then promiſe ourſelves by Diſobedience to him: what may we not promiſe ourſelves by Obedience? Our worldly Enjoyments, at beſt, are low and uncertain; our Sufferings many and ſevere; our Comforts and Supports under them poor and few; a very great Part of our Time is ſpent meanly and contemptibly, if not inſipidly and tediouſly. What a Situation is this, if we are to take it for our all, without God and without Hope! We are ſtrangely apt indeed to flatter onrſelves daily with Proſpects of this and that Pleaſure and Advantage ſoon to come. But if we look back, what very great and laſting Satisfaction hath the higheſt and the happieſt of us ever had: and what better Ground is there to expect any in the Remainder of our Days? Undoubtedly we have enough to be thankful for, and much more than we have deſerved. But is it enough to reſt in, and deſire nothing farther? Shall we feel ourſelves perſuaded, on cool Reflexion at the

the Close of Life, that going round and round the Circle of our present Amusements and Pursuits, in the Manner that we have done, and being disappointed continually by every one of them in its Turn, is all the Good that a rational Soul needs wish; especially while heavenly and eternal Bliss lies within our View and within our Reach? This would be a groveling Way of thinking indeed. But suppose our Days are cut short in the Middle, or the Beginning: suppose our Gratifications are peculiarly few; or our Distresses peculiarly heavy: still shall we aim at nothing better? At least, shall we not guard against something unspeakably worse? For consider; God is our Maker and Lord: this intitles him to our faithful Service. He is our Benefactor by all that he hath given, and all that he is ready to give us: this demands our most affectionate Gratitude. And if we deny him either, he will and must shew to the whole Creation which he governs, that they who sin, shall, unless they apply for Pardon in the Manner directed by him, suffer in Proportion. Now they do not suffer thus here: and therefore they will hereafter. Are you then contented, rather than be reconciled to God, besides losing the Promise of his Favour,

vour, to undergo, firſt the Terrors, then the Torments of his future Diſpleaſure, ſuch as his Word hath deſcribed them? Think a little of this. What ſhould induce you to it?

If Love of ſenſual Gratifications tempt you to diſobey him: irregular ones will almoſt always end, and commonly ſoon, even in preſent Miſery. If worldly Intereſt: both forbidden Methods, and immoderate Deſires of promoting it will entangle you in Perplexities, diſquiet you with Solicitude, and ſtain you with Diſhonour: you will often miſs your Aim, and never be long ſatisfied with obtaining it. If Reſentment or any Species of Malevolence biaſs you, this is being habitually and exquiſitely wretched, only for the Chance of an occaſional Joy in Miſchief, that will make you almoſt as hateful to Man as to God. Or could any of theſe Things afford you a Delight ever ſo unmixed, how very quick is the whole Scene of them paſſing away! Doth Pride then rule within you, and repreſent Submiſſion to your Creator, as beneath you? But do you not obey and honour your earthly Superiors? Do you not expect your Inferiors to ſhew every appointed, every cuſtomary Mark of Honour and Obedience to you; and even an implicit

Compliance

Compliance with your Directions? Why then is not the Author and abſolute Diſpoſer of your Being, worthy of the moſt unreſerved Duty, the moſt reſpectful Homage; and where is the Meanneſs of paying it?

But you are apprehenſive perhaps of being deſpiſed and ridiculed for your Piety and Virtue. But ſhall you not be approved and applauded by the Wiſe and Good, by many of the Bad themſelves, by the Judge of all and his holy Angels at the great Day? But, it may be, you have Doubts about Religion: and therefore you do not ſet heartily to practiſe it. Seek for Information properly then, and hearken to it fairly. Practiſe conſcientiouſly what you cannot doubt of: keep to the ſafer Side, where you do doubt: make ſure, that no ſinful Inclination prejudices you: be content, though you do not ſee every Thing, if you ſee enough to direct your Steps; and you will ſoon diſcern, which Way is beſt to take. But you are afraid of not perſevering: or though you ſhould, of not ſucceeding. Try however at leaſt. Honeſt Endeavours, if they do no more, will alleviate your Guilt. But by continuing them, you muſt gain ſome Ground: and ſhould you fall after that, and ſeem to loſe it; you may riſe again,

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and learn Skill from your Defeats to obtain at laſt the Victory. Uſing the preſcribed Means, you have God's Promiſe for it: and how ſmall ſoever your own Strength may be, his hath no Bounds.

Why doubtleſs, you will ſay, he can do every Thing: but you have been a great Sinner; and you know not how to think he will either help or even forgive you. And certain it is, that you have not deſerved it: nor can you, of yourſelf, be ſure of it. But ſtill common Reaſon gives you ſome Hope. You are frail: he is good: his Forbearance is a Degree of Forgiveneſs. Repenting, Confeſſing, Striving, muſt render your Condition better, than a contrary Behaviour would. How much indeed, he himſelf alone can tell. And therefore, if you want further Encouragement, as well you may, look into his holy Word. There he hath granted *Knowledge of Salvation to his People, by the Remiſſion of their Sins, through the tender Mercy of our God, whereby the Day-ſpring from on high hath viſited us, to give Light to them that ſit in Darkneſs and the Shadow of Death, to guide our Feet into the Way of Peace*[*]. Nay our offended Benefactor and Lawgiver and

[*] Luke i. 77, 78, 79.

Judge,

Judge, not only permits, but *beſeeches you to be reconciled.* Nor hath he ſent this Requeſt by a common Meſſenger, but by his only Son, *who had Glory with him before the World was* [x], *who in the Beginning was with God, and was God* [y]. Nor hath he ſent him, barely to make a Publication of it, from Heaven, and return: but to take upon him our Nature, bear the Inconveniences of a low Condition of Life, ſuffer Indignities, Perſecution and Death; to reconcile forgiving Goodneſs with Juſtice and Wiſdom; to notify, to prove, to conquer Prejudices againſt, the bleſſed Union of theſe Attributes. Nor even, after all this, hath he left Men to remember his gracious Invitation or forget it, as they pleaſe: but eſtabliſhed a perpetual Succeſſion of Perſons, authorized and commanded to repeat it, weekly and daily, in publick and in private, to every Age, every Nation, every Sinner; and enforce it by the ſtrongeſt Motives, that can affect the human Heart; but eſpecially that moſt engaging one, which follows the Text: *Be ye reconciled to God; for he hath made him to be Sin for us, who knew no Sin, that we might be made the Righteouſneſs of God in Him.*

[x] John xvii. 5. [y] John i. 1.

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So aſtoniſhing a Method, we may be ſure, had never been taken, had not God, who knows beſt, ſeen our Caſe was too bad for leſs powerful Remedies. And the Goodneſs of our heavenly Father in appointing this, of his Son in ſubmitting to it, of his holy Spirit in applying it to our diſeaſed Hearts, is, as the Apoſtle juſtly expreſſes himſelf, *a Love that paſſeth Knowledge* [z]. That thus much ſhould be done for any Offenders, is beyond all Imagination: yet it is done for the very worſt. But then all this Mercy is conditional: its final Effect depends on ourſelves. And *how ſhall we eſcape, if we neglect ſo great Salvation*, thus obtained for us: which *at firſt began to be ſpoken by the Lord, was confirmed by them that heard him* [a]; and is offered to you, and preſſed upon you continually by his Miniſters, who act for him, repreſent him, and beſeech you in his Stead? Every Step, taken for your Recovery, aggravates your Guilt, if it be taken in vain. And there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins [b], no other Miniſtry of Reconciliation [c], if you omit to be reconciled by this.

"But, you will ſay, we hope we are at Peace with God." If you hope it on good Grounds,

[z] Eph. iii. 19. [a] Heb. ii. 3. [b] Heb. x. 26. [c] 2 Cor. v. 18.

his Name be praiſed. But what Grounds have you? "We attend his Worſhip: we live regular Lives: few, if any, of our Neighbours, better." But do you attend all the Ordinances of his Worſhip, and conſtantly; and, to the beſt of your Power, with your Minds as well as your Bodies? Are your Lives regular in every Thing, and no wrong Inclinations, either of Fleſh or Spirit, indulged? Think a while of this. What your Neighbours are, you know but imperfectly; and it concerns you but little: both they and you ſhall be condemned, if you are not what you ought. Poſſibly enough you ſtand well in the Eſtimation of Men: but are you faultleſs in the Eyes of God? Certainly not. For *in his Sight ſhall no Man living be juſtified*[d]. Every Deed, every Word, every Thought, hath its Failure and Guilt belonging to it. Are you then convinced of your fallen and loſt Condition, of the Imperfection, the Inſufficiency, the Sinfulneſs of what is beſt in you; deeply humble, on this Account, before *the High and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, whoſe Name is Holy*[e]; ſenſible of your Need of his Pardon and Grace; thankful Believers in the Satisfaction of his

[d] Pſ. cxliii. 2. [e] Iſ. lvii. 15.

Son,

Son, in the ſanctifying Influences of his Spirit? Do you accordingly pray to him daily in private, from the Bottom of your Soul; examine diligently your outward Behaviour, your inward Movements of Heart, as in his Preſence; yield up yourſelves to his Will, and make it your great Aim to ſerve and pleaſe him: not only in Acts of Faith and Devotion, (though indiſpenſable and moſt important Duties) but in a Conduct of Benevolence and Equity, of Mildneſs, Uſefulneſs and Bounty to all your Fellow-Creatures; in Lowlineſs of Mind, in Chaſtity, Sobriety and Temperance? Have you conſidered well, not merely what your own very fallible, and perhaps very partial, Reaſonings ſuggeſt to you, but what his Word requires of you? Are you honeſtly careful to obſerve all its Rules: and do you find produced in yourſelves by them, a Spirit of Love and Duty to God; and a Deſire, ſuperior to all others, of enjoying a ſpiritual Happineſs for ever with him? What is the Anſwer of your Conſciences to theſe Queſtions?

If an unfavourable one; do not deſpair, be it ever ſo much ſo: for we have an high Prieſt, *able to ſave to the uttermoſt them that come to God by him*[f]. But loſe not a Moment's Time: preſs

[f] Heb. vii. 25.

home your Convictions on your Souls; beg his Interceſſion, plead his Merits, follow his Directions, *acquaint yourſelves with him, and be at Peace*[g]. If it be a doubtful Anſwer: can you bear to continue in Doubt concerning your great, your eternal Intereſt; impatient as you are apt to be of Uncertainty in very ſmall Matters? That would be a bad Sign indeed. "But how ſhall we remove the Doubt?" Not by perplexing yourſelves with Gueſſes in the Dark: but by removing the Cauſe. Whatever you find amiſs, after praying to God for Pardon and Strength, ſet immediately to amend; and in Proportion to your Progreſs, you will have the only true Ground of Comfort. For *hereby know we, that we know him, if we keep his Commandments*[h]. Whoever doth ſo, though imperfectly, yet ſincerely and humbly, hath nothing to fear: whoever doth not, hath nothing to hope. Strong Feelings of joyful Aſſurance may be given to the Pious from above, as a preſent Reward: and ſtrong Feelings of vain Preſumption may lead on the Wicked, ſecure and triumphant, to their final Deſtruction. Very reaſonable Terrors, from Conſciouſneſs of their Guilt, may torment the Bad before-

[g] Job xxii. 21. [h] 1 John ii. 3.

hand:

hand: and very unreaſonable ones, from Conſtitution, or the Suggeſtions of Satan, may aſſault the Good. Therefore we are to judge of our Condition by none of theſe Things; but by the Scripture Rule, fairly interpreted: *Little Children, let no Man deceive you: he that doth Righteouſneſs is righteous: he that committeth Sin, is of the Devil*[i].

If then Obedience to the Goſpel is the Principle, by which you deſignedly and habitually govern your Lives: Thank God for it, take Comfort in it, and be happy, whatever befalls you in this World. But ſtill remember, that every Degree of Sin remaining is a Degree of Enmity remaining: and who then hath not Need *to be reconciled* more completely? St. *Paul* had already told the Perſons, to whom he ſpeaks in the Text, that *his Hope of them was ſtedfaſt; knowing, that as they were Partakers of the Sufferings of Chriſt, they ſhould be Partakers of his Conſolation alſo*[k]. But notwithſtanding this, he continues to beſeech them, *Be ye reconciled to God.* If we ſee into ourſelves at all, the beſt of us muſt ſee, that there are many Things in us, which we cannot approve. If we have any due Senſe of his Goodneſs to

[i] 1 John iii. 7, 8. [k] 2 Cor. i. 7.

us,

us, and of Love to him in Return; we ſhall[l] earneſtly wiſh and labour to be more pleaſing to him, and more like him. If we have any Experience of what is true Happineſs here, or any Ambition of a high Rank in Happineſs hereafter, we ſhall ſurely reflect, that both depend on our Improvements in pure Religion and genuine Virtue. If we have any right Apprehenſion of the Dangers, that ſurround us, we muſt foreſee, that unleſs we preſs forward, we ſhall be driven back and fall: but the further we advance, on the ſurer Ground we ſhall ſtand. And if we have any juſt Zeal for the Glory of our bleſſed Redeemer; we ſhall deeply lament, that our Failings have ſo frequently given others Occaſion to *blaſpheme that worthy Name, whereby we are called*[l]; and ſhall uſe our utmoſt Endeavours to adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things[m]: which that we may accordingly, he of his infinite Mercy grant: to whom be all Honour and Praiſe, now and for ever. *Amen.*

[l] James ii. 7. [m] Tit. ii. 10.

END of VOL. III.